

BANDWAGON

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2009



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In 1933 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey celebrated its Golden Jubilee. This is the cover of the 1933 program. The spec was led by a girl on an elephant, both panted gold.

THE BACK COVER

This photo of the John Robinson Circus midway was taken around 1923 by Karl Kae Knecht, using a 5" x 7" Garflex camera.

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I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) FredD. Pfening, Jr, publisher. (10-1-09)

Yesterday's Cowboy, Today's Kinker:

You're Never Too Old

To be a Circus 'Drifter'

By Lane Talburt

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From the tips of his cowboy boots to the top of his Western hat, Darrell Hawkins was experiencing a resurgence of wanderlust as he sat on a wooden-plank seat under a weather-beaten big top in Deming, New Mexico. Like his fellow towners, he was clapping, smiling and laughing at the antics of a small but energetic band of circus performers who were plying their skills in a single ring.

That was the day, in October, 1987, when the "single-again" owner of a Deming barbershop and trailer court decided he must return to his drifting ways—and soon. The Culpepper & Merriweather Great Combined Circus, he determined, would provide his passport to freedom. Not freedom from work, but freedom from being tied down to one place.

First "Hawk" Hawkins had to convince circus owner Robert "Red" Johnson that the townie was not too old to endure the rigors of a relentless, 230-day, non-stop touring season. Being 58 was no barrier for a Kansas-reared farm boy who'd been toughened by years of herding cattle on Western ranges, Hawkins insisted. Besides, Darrell offered a lifetime accumulation of skills that dovetailed with the needs of an 11-member mud-and-dust show which spent eight months each year putting over 12,000 miles on the tiny fleet's speedometers while leaving brief footprints on more than 200 communities in a dozen states.

In addition to extensive animal husbandry experience, he had pulled cattle-laden semis to cattle auctions, and, as a soldier, had maneuvered Sherman tanks over pock-marked terrain. Hawkins also was equipped to repair any electrical malfunction, having responded to the never-ending demands of his mobile home park tenants.

And he had a Will Rogers-style gift of gab, sprinkled with large doses of self-deprecating humor. This latter trait prob-

ably helped him close the deal with Johnson. The "aw shucks" approach would come in handy whenever Darrell had to wiggle out of tight spots with local inspectors in future "tomorrow's towns" scattered across the American landscape.

At any rate the harried, tow-headed circus owner assured the graying but self-assured local that he would put him to work if Darrell showed up at winter quarters in Buckeye, Arizona—near Phoenix—the following February.

Darrell Hawkins at age 20. All illustrations are from the Hawkins collection.



What "Hawk" Hawkins failed to mention during his "job interview" was his mastery of rope-spinning, an asset that would make him even more valuable both inside and outside the ring. His role model and teacher for that performing skill was a neighbor in Emporia, Kansas, where Darrell was born on August 19, 1928, the oldest of Willard and Bessie Hawkins's five children. The Bud E. Anderson Circus headquartered in barns which the former Wild West show owner built just east of town during the 1930s.

The brick-and-mortar structures, which sheltered a collection of exotic animals, attested to Anderson's financial acumen during the hard-scrabbled years of the Great Depression. They can be spotted even today alongside Highway 50, though they now house an auto repair business, Hawkins noted.

Back then, the barns and surrounding acreage were the winter home for zebras, camels, llamas, caged animals—including monkeys, and anywhere from three to eight elephants. And, of course, numerous horses, some of which Anderson used to enhance his trick-riding and roping

The Bud E. Anderson winter quarters in Emporia, Kansas.



skills and others which he drove on his overland wagon shows up until 1931.

Darrell occasionally rode his first pony, a gift from his father, to the circus quarters, where he hung out with the owner's son, Luke. Better known as Norman within the circus business, Luke would field equally successful circuses in the second half of the 20th Century.

"Bud was the first man I ever seen spinning a rope," Hawkins said. "And he showed me how when I was about 11 years old. I just followed him and learnt the rest by myself. Then I learned to trick ride." (Anderson died in 1950 when the truck-semi-trailer he was driving for his Seal Bros. Circus overturned on a steep mountain road in Montana.) In addition, Darrell attended local performances of larger circuses with "Brothers" titles--Ringling, Cole and Dailey.

Hawkins derived an early interest in hooved animals from scrutinizing cattle-loading operations at livestock pens along rail sidings in Emporia. His father was an engineer for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad, which maintained a roundhouse there. Emporia provided a convenient watering stop for cattle being shipped over the steel ribbons from ranges in Texas and Oklahoma to markets in Kansas City and Chicago. In addition, it was the rail gateway to wide swaths of rich tall grass in the Flint Hills not more than 25 miles to the west, where many thousands of cattle were brought to graze and fatten for eventual slaughter at gigantic rendering houses.

Because Darrell's kinfolk had small ranches in those rolling hills, he was able, at age 12, to put those roping skills to practical use as a cowhand. His first pony was a gift from his father in 1939. To a young boy, the tasks of de-horning cattle, shearing and dipping sheep, and milking cows at a local dairy became an every-day part of summertime in Southeastern Kansas. In his own backyard, Hawkins also helped his father tend to hogs and chickens and to harvest small alfalfa crops.

As a high-achiever in Boy and Explorer Scout programs, he acquired an early taste for adventuring, possibly influenced by a 10-day canoe outing in Minnesota. He also developed a penchant for tackling odd jobs; for example, he crafted window shades at a local department store and handled fresh-grown fruits and vegetables on a produce company's dock.

In the summer of 1944, the strapping youth got his first exposure to circus life on the road. He spent several weeks on Bud Anderson's aptly named Victory Circus. Watching the interaction between performers and the audience spurred him to demonstrate his roping techniques in front of classmates at school assemblies back in Emporia.

Prior to entering his 12th year of formal education, Darrell set out on his first wheat harvest. Starting in the high plains of Northwest Texas, he labored from sunrise to sunset, following combines that sliced through the heart of America's grain belt in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota.

His appetite for roving still not satiated, young Hawkins ventured to Cheyenne, Wyoming, where he tried his hand at steer-riding during Frontier Days--earning \$5 a turn, then moseyed on over to Arizona. There he packed mules for a



Another view of a young Hawkins at a ranch in New Mexico.

harrowing ride to the bottom of Grand Canyon.

By the time Hawkins graduated from Emporia high school in 1947, he already had obtained a liberal education in outdoor living--farming, camping, herding livestock and harvesting wheat. The last two vocations, in particular, taught him the value of teamwork and coordination.

In June of 1947 Darrell returned to the Oklahoma Panhandle to join a migrant wheat harvest crew. Quickly tired of the tedium, he hitch-hiked his way back home. En route, he was picked up by another young man, who invited Hawkins to join him at a barbering college in Wichita, Kansas. A brief inspection of those hair-trimming facilities convinced Hawkins that he preferred shearing sheep, and that being confined indoors was not for him. Besides, he was already giving crude haircuts to a younger brother at home.

Cowboy Life Trumps Circus

Sporting a healthy tan, the strapping teenager and a buddy drove to Pueblo, Colorado, where they were hired onto a small ranch. There Hawkins learned of opportunities to be a wrangler in the wide-open expanses of Southwestern New Mexico. "They were still running those big round-up wagons," he recalled, noting that "chuck wagon" was not in the lingo of real cowboys.

Carrying his saddle and bedroll, he boarded trains bound for El Paso and, ultimately, the tiny town of Hachita in New Mexico's boot hill area. The job of a drifting cowboy awaited Hawkins on the sprawling, 300-section U-Bar ranch, owned by E. K. Warren out of Three Oaks, Michigan. Initially, he was tackled odd duties such as shoeing horses. When at last the wagon-escorted group of cowhands pulled out for a three-month fall roundup, young Hawkins found himself in the great outdoors day in and day out.

Steep, treeless mountains framed the U Bar's arid valleys, which saw sufficient moisture--8 to 10 inches a year--to supply ample stands of grammar grass for large grazing herds. There's no need to make hay out of grammar grass, he explained. "It cures right on the stem; it makes good runner feed."

Hawkins said he drove herds often numbering between two and three-thousand head. "When you work on those

big ranches, they issue to each cowboy nine to 12 head of horses"—at the start of the round-up, he explained. "Three of them are circle horses—that's when you go out in the morning and gather the cattle. Then you change horses to what they call evening horses—and that's when you do your cutting and branding. And then you have your night horses to keep out in case you have a night stampede, or for night guarding the herd when necessary.

Darrell pointed out that "the idea of having three horses for each job was that they were grass fed, so they were ridden every third day and got to rest two days. In the morning you take turns jingling the horses, and somebody would go out and get them" for the day's continued drive. Jingling, he explained, refers to the noise made by a bell tied around a horse's neck. The tinny sound enables the drover to locate the free-roaming horse at the start of the workday. (That is, Hawkins went on, unless the smarter-than-your-ordinary horse stands perfectly still.)

The round-up wagon cook served cowhands an early breakfast, lunch at mid-morning and supper late in the afternoon. "Often we ate at three different locations as the herd was moving during the day," Hawkins pointed out.

Being the youngest cowboy on the drive, Darrell was the first to be laid off when the first wagon pulled in. In the fall of 1947 he moved into the slightly larger town of Deming (population 3,000), whose businesses provisioned the widely scattered ranches throughout the region. Located some 35 miles north of the Mexican border, Deming once prided itself on being the site where the Silver Spike was driven to mark the link-up of the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads, opening the nation's second transcontinental rail line on March 8, 1881. (The commemorative spike has long since been misplaced, Hawkins said, and no one can pinpoint the exact spot.)

Hawkins took a job on a nearby smaller ranch—it had only 75 sections (at 640 acres per section, you do the math). "They put me on a cow camp on the border. I stayed two weeks but didn't like this, so I found another wagon out and quit. From then on, I just kind of drifted. Whenever a wagon went out one place, that's where I would be, all through Arizona, Colorado, up through Wyoming and back down" to Deming, which has been Hawkins's hometown for more than six decades.

He then signed on with a larger ranch, the Diamond A, at about 900 sections, in his adopted "Land of Opportunities." The list of ranches he worked on almost takes up a full page—among them the H bar Y, C lazy U and the Poll M. Scattered among those short-lived cow-punching jobs, Hawkins patrolled the White Sands missile-testing range on horseback to shoo away stray cattle, entered rodeo competitions as a bronco-buster and bull rider, and learned the art of saddle-making. He also briefly pumped gas at a service station and strung electrical wires in the New Mexican boot hill.

The outbreak of the Korean conflict put his "cowboy-ing" on hold for several years. In early 1951 Hawkins was inducted into the Army at Ft. Bliss in El Paso. He completed basic training at Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio and was sent to Indiana to learn how to drive a Sherman tank at Camp Atter-

bury. Destined for deployment in Korea, Hawkins's regiment was diverted to Germany by a Cold War flare-up. He spent 13 months driving a tank along the West German side of the heavily-armed border, watching the Soviet bloc troops who were, in turn, eyeballing the Americans' every move.

When he wasn't on patrol, Hawkins gave haircuts to his fellow G.I.s; he was the company barber, a chore that was exempt from the usual state license.

Beatty Winters in Deming

On being discharged, he returned to Deming and to ranching in early 1953. In late October, the 15-car Clyde Beatty Circus train was switched onto a siding at the decommissioned Deming Army Air Force training base southwest of town. Village officials had leased a portion of the sprawling site to Beatty for use as his off-season quarters. Terms of the five-year contract, though not publicly revealed, were known to be generous. In fact, Hawkins said, city fathers had baited their hook with a \$5 a year deal, the only additional expense being the monthly water bill for workers and animals occupying abandoned hangars and barracks. Local merchants were expecting a procurement windfall.

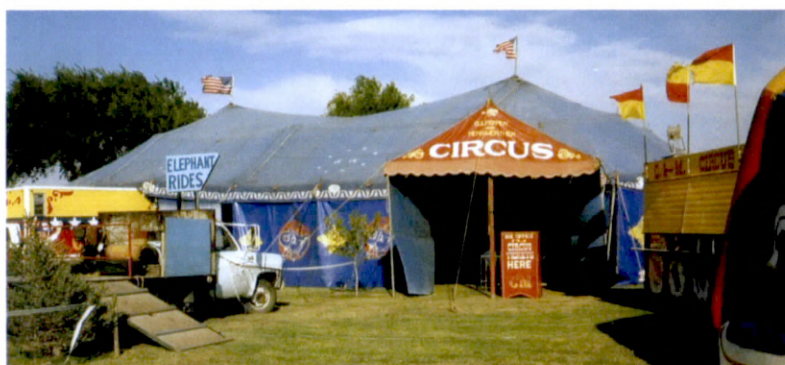
For the next three winters, the circus train sat moribund at the former air base while America's most famous wild animal trainer was either wooing investors from his California home or playing Shrine circus dates in the Midwest and South. "The whole circus was there, including elephants," Hawkins noted, "And people could go out and watch them for free."

Darrell went to winter quarters on one occasion to help hostlers trim show horses' feet. On another, he gave the owner a haircut—a freebie, since Hawkins still lacked the required state license.

After Beatty was forced to sell off his circus mid-1956, the reorganized show—still carrying his name—left Deming for the last time in and, following a financially successful, 13-week tour, relocated its winter quarters to Deland, Florida.

Though Hawkins continued ranching—he was promoted to foreman and even had his own small spread, he saw the need for supplemental income as a hedge against severe drought. Thus, in 1957, he enrolled in a Fort Worth, Texas, barbers college. Returning to Deming in 1958 and having finally secured his papers, Hawkins worked for several local haircutters before installing the traditional red-and-white-striped pole outside his own establishment, Star Barber

The Culpepper midway in 1988. The big top was a former Kelly-Miller menagerie 60 x 100 foot tent.



shop, at 116 N. Silver St., in 1963.

In 1969 he purchased 10 acres on the edge of town and began developing Carefree Mobile Home Park. "I kind of poor-boyed it, adding space by space as I could pay for it. I was barbering at that time. I was also a locksmith, and I had some other things going for me.

Robert "Red" Johnson in 1988.

"It wasn't what you made in barbering, but what you could pick up a lot on the side. You could wheel and deal a little. Barbering was a good trade for a dummy," he joked.

It was also a good way to meet the community's movers and shakers. In almost no time, Darrell was elected president of the Deming Jaycees, joined the Chamber of Commerce, the American Legion and VFW posts and Luna County Sheriffs Posse, and was named the first governor of Deming Moose Lodge #2008. He also managed to go on retreats with his buddies in nearby national parks and public lands.

But staying in one place increasingly was giving him "itchy feet," and, following a second divorce, "I was just ready to move again. That's why he glommed onto Red Johnson's three-year-old Culpepper and Merriweather Circus (founded by Johnson, B. J. Hebert and Curtis Cainan) when the nomadic troupe visited Deming in October 1987. "He had a nice show, and I knew I wanted to go back" to the circus. Admittedly, Hawkins hadn't actually traveled with a circus since Bud Anderson's tent show in 1944, and that provided only a brief exposure.

But, he reasoned, "What I'd learned from Bud Anderson was spinning my rope, which gave me a good act in later years. Also, the logistics of the circus always interested

m e — h o w you can pack things away and go, and do it systematically.

Hawkins, the Culpepper electrician 1988.

And I've carried that throughout



my life, even in my personal life."

Hawkins cutting Red Johnson's hair.

"Going fishing!" to the Circus

Hawkins liked what he saw: a small show with a canvas tent measuring some 50 by 80 feet and seating 600-700 people around a 33-foot ring (its diameter nine feet less than the circus standard). The two-masted, push-pole big top, he observed, was being put up and taken down, folded and hoisted onto a flatbed truck by brute human strength. In fact, only 11 employees, including Johnson, were

available to stage performances and to transport the circus.

"I had watched them put up the tent," he said. "Then I took my truck to a farmer friend and got some bales of oat hay for the circus. I then had lunch with them in the big top in Deming."

During the meal Hawkins tried to persuade the owner to add him on as the 12th employee. But Johnson, then only 37, was reluctant to hire a considerably older man who would be reaching his 60th birthday within two years. Darrell persisted, following up with a letter and phone calls. Johnson finally relented, telling Hawkins to show up at winter quarters in Buckeye, Arizona, a community west of Phoenix, for the start of the next season. Meanwhile, Hawkins learned through the grapevine that the show's electrician would not be returning.

Only a month and a half into the New Year, Hawkins posted a "gone fishing" sign in the window of his Deming barbershop, closing the business for good. "Only my lawyer and the manager of my mobile home park knew how to contact me in case of emergency. I didn't tell anyone else I was running away to join the circus."

On February, 12, 1988, Darrell made the three-hour trek to C&M quarters, bringing along his barbering equipment, electrical tools, horseshoeing equipment and "my ropes, which I always had with me."

"As soon as I got out of my car, Red says, 'Hawkins, do you figure you could be electrician this year?' I said, 'Yeah, I got my stuff.' So I was show electrician from then on," he laughed. The new trouper had just earned the dubious distinction of being both a first-of-May and the second most senior person on the show after office manager Col. Bill Burger.

In addition to stringing wires from a new trailer-mounted generator to power the circus's small but growing physical plant, Hawkins drove a pickup truck and pulled the office trailer. He also sold concessions for Cap and Lynn Jacobs.



Hawkins drove this tent spool truck pulling a seat wagon.

He was assigned a bunk in the sleeper, which occupied the rear of the band wagon—true to circus tradition, Johnson insisted on backing acts with live music.

Goosed by the "Gorilla"

Two days before the show left winter quarters to embark on its 1988 route, Terrell "Cap" Jacobs, grandson of the famed "Lion King" and the son of performer-trainer Terrell "Punch" Jacobs Jr. asked Hawkins if he would assist him and his wife, Lynn, with their comedic "gorilla" act, a staple of many shows.

"Yeah," Hawkins instantly responded. "I was always gung-ho to do anything. Even in the Army I'd volunteer, because you'd learn a lot and see a lot."

"So during the gorilla act, I would be in the tent selling popcorn anyway, and the gorilla (Jacobs inside the costume) would come up and grab me and goose me. And he'd do it twice, and I wouldn't feel it. Finally, on the third time, he'd do it harder, and I'd turn around and see it. And of course, that scared the hell out of me, so I'd dump popcorn on the audience and then run out. I did that twice a day for two years."

It didn't take Hawkins too long to settle in. "When I got on Red's show, I hadn't worked that much (on a circus), but I'd been exposed to a lot. I knew a lot, just what to do." He was a fixture on the circus over the next nine years, although he skipped parts of some tours to meet commitments on other shows.

For the first 30 days of each season Culpepper & Merriweather stayed close to home, its bookings centering on Phoenix-area school yards with ready-made audiences. Then the nomadic band took the show to California and other Western states before making a lengthy swing through the Midwest and Southwest. Jumps averaging 80 miles were common to Rocky Mountain sites. Most stands were singletons, with a few two and three-day engagements welcomed by the thinly stretched crew. The later dates tended to be associated with community-wide events in small towns tagged by easy-to-forget names. The longest stand of the season—the Taste of Chicago in Grant Park—was both the most enjoyable and the most exhausting for the troupe, Hawkins recalled. For 10 consecutive days they presented four 30-minute shows a day.

Overall, however, the circus was able to remain under the radar of larger competitors by sticking to its niche of sparsely populated towns.

The performance roster was solid, if not altogether spectacular. With Red Johnson as the ringmaster, the line up featured Jim Zaijek presenting Barbara, a three-year-old orphaned African elephant acquired the previous season,

reportedly from Hollywood Animal Park. Zaijek also displayed snappy routines as a juggler, wire walker and rola bola artist.

"Jim said Barbara hadn't been trained, but he kept her under control and did teach her some new acts," Hawkins said. "He was very good at it."

Even though Barbara was too young to help erect the tent or give rides on the midway, the circus still offered patrons the opportunity for souvenir photos with the elephant standing behind. In a subsequent season, C&W added a second elephant, Connie.

Later, Tom Tomshek joined the troupe as a clown, supplementing B. J. Hebert's efforts, and as a candy butcher.

"Tom had been a music major in college and could play almost any instrument," Hawkins recalled. "Later on in our show, when the keyboard man ('Doc' Harold Devalcourt) quit, Tom took over and ran with his music from then on."

Among other newcomers were Heidi Wendany, who presented a dressage routines (in addition to dogs and pony rides); Cap Jacobs with a pony drill; and Dean Girard, who performed illusions and took over ringmastering duties from the owner.

Although Hawkins continued to practice with his ropes during down time, Johnson was not aware of his new worker's performing capabilities. Other than the faux gorilla piece of flim-flammy, the closest Darrell came to the ring was when he trussed up the ponies and held them at the backdoor for their ring appearance.

Stepping into the Spotlight

"That first year we'd been on the road about two months, and we were sitting around the ring on the first night of a two-day stand. Red got up and told Terrell Jacobs, 'Cap, I need another four-minute act.' Terrell says, 'Darrell Hawkins, there, can spin a rope.' Red came over and asked, 'Can you spin the big loop?'"

When Hawkins responded affirmatively, Johnson told Hawkins to be prepared to take his routine into the ring within the week. "Red even bought my Western shirts. He paid \$60 each for two shirts. I'd never paid that much before."

Darrell's new act was bigger than life, and his big rope filled the 33 foot ring. Being a neophyte in the ring, Hawkins appreciated Devalcourt's experience as a circus musician. "Doc couldn't read a note, but he had a (solid) memory, and his music was good. You could be doing your act and if you slipped and fell, the music slipped and fell right with you."

True to long-standing tradition, the more acts Darrell could perform, the more the owner asked him to do. "I took up whip-popping," Hawkins noted. "Also I did a little unsupported ladder act, I did rola bola, a little juggling—not enough to say I was good. It was very enjoyable; I couldn't have picked a better show to go back on the road with."

"I was getting \$20 a day," Hawkins laughed. "And I got \$5 more for being the show electrician. But I didn't get nothing else for being in the show." In addition to taking part in the all-hands-on deck tent raising, he continued to drive a truck on jumps and to peddle popcorn, cotton candy and cold drinks under the big top.

Making the transition from cowboying and barbering proved fairly easy for Hawkins, who thoroughly enjoyed rising early each morning to head out to the next town. But

he admitted he found it more difficult to adjust to staying awake after sundown, as was his habit on cattle drives, so that he could help with the teardown, which often kept him up until 11 p.m. He maintained his barbering skills by providing haircuts—gratis.

Johnson continued to pile on other duties. Hawkins occasionally stepped in to lay out the lot. But Darrell's favorite was jawboning the local law enforcement officers, especially the inspectors. That's when his gift of gab came in handy, especially when the show enjoyed straw houses, and Darrell had to jam as many circusgoers together under the big top as possible.

Always Room for Two More

"When we had a full house, my job was high-seating. We'd also pull out some extra sidewall and put it on the ground. Man, we'd seat people right up to the ring.

"Sometimes an inspector would say, 'Now you're counting [the customers], right?' I'd say, 'Oh yeah, I'm counting them.' 'Well you're about full.' And I'd say, 'Well, I can put two more over there [laughing].'

"One time I had the tent full, and the inspector was there, and the wind was blowing like the dickens. I was still letting them come in, and I told the inspector, 'Well, I figure they were just as safe inside as they were outside.'

"Most of the inspectors were good to work with. Some wanted to go by the book instead of being really practical. But I got along with them good, and Red just turned it over to me."

During one of the early-season performances in California, the big top was being severely tested by strong winds. "We were on sandy soil, and I was walking around, a stake came up, and I was able to tie it [the tent rope] to a truck."

The intensity of the winds forced other performers, including Heidi Wendany to grab sledge hammers to double-stake the canvass top. "We had people in the tent high in the bleachers who turned around and held the side poles. They weren't going to leave. But we kept the tent up."

Darrell said the circus carried two sets of stakes. "We carried iron stakes for most [lots]. In sandy ground, the tent would hold better with pine wooden stakes."

At the time Hawkins first saw the circus in Deming in 1987, the canvas tent measured 50 by 80 feet (50-foot round with a 40-foot middle section). When he joined C&M in early 1988, the crew was using jacks-and-stringer seating, six high, all around. With the acquisition in 1988 of a recently retired vinyl menagerie top from David Rawls's Kelly Miller Circus. This one came in at 60'x 100' (60 feet round, and two 20-foot middles.) "We lapped it onto a flatbed trailer," he moaned. Even with this expansion, the performance was confined to a 33-foot-diameter ring.

In 1989 Red bought his first new tent, a 70'x 110' (70-foot round with a 40-foot middle) with 10-foot sidewalls, and built a spool truck to roll it onto the truck bed. "At first we powered the spool by hand," Hawkins said. Later, this manual chore was replaced by a hydraulically-powered unit. The show also was able to hit the road that year with its first seat wagon.

In 1995 Johnson purchased his second new tent, an 80'x 120' (80-foot round with a 40-foot middle), enabling the show to start using the standard 42-foot ring. At last report, Culpepper and Merriweather—under Trey Key's ownership



The Culpepper big top loaded on a flat bed trailer.

since 2000—was still erecting that same tent daily.

"The Circus is a Test" if Skills, Wills

These expansions also enabled—or necessitated—the owner to take on more employees. As the 34-week, 1989 season came to a close, a newspaper reporter for the Casa Grande, Arizona, Dispatch noted that Johnson's payroll had expanded to 23 members. In the October 19 account, writer Dina I. Doolen reviewed the performance.

Praising the small elephant's agility, he pointed out that "Barbara may be the animal star of the show, but the rest of her human counterparts shared the spotlight. Virtually every one of the versatile troupe performed in three or more acts.

"Although the circus is small, it is hardly short on the number and variety of acts. Not only did it offer an assortment of clowns, a trapeze/rope artist and jugglers, but also a ropewalker, a fire eater, an expert bullwhip showman and even a cowboy performing rope tricks, just to name a few. Other animal entertainers (besides Barbara, by then age 5) included a trick horse, performing dogs and liberty ponies."

Picking up on the owner's fatigue at tour's end, the reporter quoted Johnson: "There are easier ways to make a living. It's like any job though, after a while it gets to you. . . It's a culture, really. You can't fake what you are. When the chips are down, the circus is a test of what you're made of."

Hawkins' admiration and respect for the owner continue to grow as he observed Johnson's stewardship over his employees and the day-to-day operations. "He always made his payroll," Hawkins said.

Red's Mentor: John Strong

Before founding Culpepper and Merriweather in 1984, Johnson's career path had been somewhat similar to Darrell's. "Red started out kind of drifting around, bumming around, I guess," said Hawkins. "Then he got with John Strong's circus as a roustabout. Then he learned how to walk a wire. He worked the revolving ladder. He learned fire-eating."

With the imposing, 6-foot-five-inch Strong as his mentor, Johnson developed good business habits and prospered at running a small show.

"And John was on the show with us a lot of the time. He'd already closed up [his circus]. We worked a lot of the old John Strong dates. John was quite a showman, and Red followed him pretty good."

In fact, the aging showman, who closed his own tent show in 1984, returned the following year to play a number

of California dates with his younger counterpart under a separate title. As the October 10, 1985, edition of the Ukiah, CA, *Daily Journal*, reported, "In recognition of California's first circus performance in 1869, Big John Strong and the Culpepper and Merriweather Circus have combined to bring their own '1869 Circus' to California." Strong died in 1992, having gained the respect of movers and shakers within the circus industry since he emerged as a performer in 1948.

Ill health also forced Johnson to depend heavily on his own experienced team. Hawkins, in particular, monitored his boss's diabetic condition.

Darrell Hawkins on Culpepper in 1996.

"My sleeper was in the front part of the bandwagon" Hawkins said. "Red would keep some candy or pills there, right at the back door. And in case he got in trouble, I could just give [the medication] to him right there.

"He also smoked a lot, and we'd have to watch him, or he'd get into it. But Red was good family, had good people."

Of course, Darrell wasn't always on hand to perform and to help with the setup. His habits as a drifter being well ingrained, he occasionally played other shows whenever tempting offers came his way.

Hawkins was away from the circus in 1990, choosing to drift on his own, sometimes with his bachelor buddies from Deming.

Those days were about to come to an end.

Hawkins Gains a Partner

When Darrell returned to Deming in early 1991, he discovered that one of his best friends, Gene Ruebush, had died of cancer. Ruebush and his wife Deloris had been married for 38 years and had operated a Western wear and saddle shop in Deming. They had known Hawkins as a frequent customer and had been involved with him in community affairs over the years.

Having missed his friend's funeral, Hawkins sent a card of condolence to the widow. He then followed with a phone call to Deloris, inviting her to lunch. She accepted.

Deloris recalled her critically ill husband's advice just months earlier. "He didn't want me to be alone, and I told him I wasn't going barhopping looking for anyone. And he says, 'Darrell would be nice.'"

After meeting Hawkins for lunch, Deloris says simply, "I haven't gone home since."

Initially, however, she was reluctant to leave Deming to follow Darrell when he invited her to accompany him to a roping convention in California. She had been a homebody, raising three children who were now out on their own. But she did go, and as Darrell was preparing to return to Culpepper and Merriweather for the 1991 season, she asked, "Can I go with you?"

Darrell and Deloris have been a couple since then, tying



the marital knot on Mother's Day 1992.

Inevitably, Deloris was absorbed into the circus life, with duties that matched her skills as a bookkeeper in the Western goods store. Circus office manager Bill Berger recruited her to sell tickets.

"I loved selling tickets to the circus," she said. "I love people coming in; I love seeing their faces—they're all excited."

Within a short time, Johnson hired her to work in the office wagon. Returning to Deming after their initial circus season together, Deloris assumed she would have to earn her keep by getting a job locally. Hawkins nixed the idea, pointing out that his mobile home park and other rental properties were providing a steady stream of income.

Beside, she reckoned, "I guess it wouldn't look good if the bookkeeper ran away with the circus in March and [local citizens'] taxes were due in April."

Hawkins also incorporated his new wife into his performance routines. "First," she explained, "he had to teach me how to spin a rope. So I practiced and was able to do that."

Darrell also taught Deloris to style and to hand him the ropes during the act. They continued to perform together off and on through the 1996 season, when Mrs. Hawkins was promoted to road office manager. They also took on 24-hour duties ahead of the show—"Darrell drove, and I posted the arrows," Deloris said.

End of the (Tanbark) Trail

During their final season, the couple also enjoyed the friendship of veteran performers Bobby and Lauren Fairchild, newcomers to the show. "They done an impalement act, with knives and tomahawks. Bobby threw; he was a left-hand thrower. And then they done whips, too. They stayed a few seasons before they went back to Florida and bought a little carnival outfit and worked like that."

(Hawkins provided a partial roster of performers and workers who were on Culpepper & Merriweather from 1986 until the couple left the show at the end of the 1996 tour. That list follows this story.)

At the end of the 1996 tour, Hawkins officially retired. The couple returned to their mobile home park in Deming, but continued to visit the show occasionally. He maintained his availability to perform at spot dates. Throughout the 1990's, Hawkins appeared on Monty Montana's western-themed shows in New Mexico and Arizona and toured Alaska with Dave Twoomy's Happytime Circus. An agent booked him for corporate events and to provide halftime entertainment for basketball games at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. The couple also paraded their talents at widely scattered western celebrations.

Darrell and Deloris still travel frequently. They attended the 2009 convention of Circus Fans Association in Las Vegas, where they exhibited in the bull room. Darrell sold--and lib-



Darrell and Deloris Hawkins on Culpepper & Merriweather in 1996.

erally gave away--much of his memorabilia collection. Hawkins has been a member of CFA and Circus Historical Society for the past two decades.

Having been a townner for most of her life, Deloris admitted that circus life wasn't for everybody. "If you have to think about it, then it's not for you."

Reflecting on his experiences as a cowboy and a circus performer, Darrell added, with a hearty chuckle, "I've had a good life, and many a good time."

Can You Spot A Performer You Know?

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The small American circus tradition-ally has offered opportunities for young performers to develop their skills, and to more mature performers, many who simply prefer the challenging life of a mud show that moves daily. The following list of Culpepper & Merriweather Circus employees and their responsibilities from 1987 to 1997 was compiled by Darrell Hawkins, who was on the show during most of that period. It contains many names familiar to circus historians and fans. (Hawkins said he could not remember the names of an English couple and a prop man on the show in 1987.)

Robert "Red" Johnson, owner, ringmaster
Col. Bill Burger, office

Jim Zaicjek, elephant, high wire, rola bola
B. J. "Big Jim" Hebert, clown
Cap Terrell Jacobs III, whips, liberty ponies, concessions
Lynn Metezer Jacobs, web, single trap, concessions
Harold "Doc" Devalcourt, keyboard
Curtis Cainen, goats, juggling, dogs
Darrell Hawkins, roping, electrician, truck driver, concessions, 24-hour man
Heidi Wendany, dogs, dressage, juggling, pony rides
Dean Girard, ringmaster, pony rides
Tom Tomashek, clown, keyboard, concessions
Jim Page, clown
Kelly Cainen, props
Ron Pace and Chris Kennington (Sugar & Spice), cradle
Dave and Sissy Conners, trampoline
Dick Wade, Patches the clown
Peppy, clown
Yolanta and Mirek Szczepanski, the Joyllis, Russian ring
Jay Evans, juggler, ropes
Dave "Stilts" Volponi
Joe De-Meo, Jo-Jo the clown
Deloris Ruebush Hawkins, office, tickets, 24-hour man, styled for roping, spec
Kevin Ryan, clown
Brent Dewitt, Cheeko the clown
Bobby Fairchild, impalement, whips
Lauren Fairchild, cloud swing, snakes
Rebecca "Becky" Ostroff, web, rings, trap
Marshall Eckelman, trumpet
Billy Ray King, drums, keyboard
Joy King, cook
Byron Burford, drums
Dennis Sherman, drums
Casey Cainen, elephant, juggling
Rich Schrepfer, tent crew
Turtle Benson, elephant
Tavana Luvas, single trap (also on show in 1986)
Danny Carey Brown, concessions
Oran Luke, high wire
Dewey Welch, drums
Mel Virgil, tent crew
Dave Brandt, back door
Jimmy Vaughn, props
Amy Gabert, spec
Gayle Gabert, spec
Chuck Montoya, tent crew
Sid Biggs, tent crew
Lester Burrage, tent crew
Edgar and Cecilia Ayala, and Arlene, Lascote and Sigred Ayla, various duties
Jalo De'Ava
Kristine Carroll, office
Joe Wilcox, drums, tent crew
Josie Sabatino, animal handler
Allison Cainan, clown
Loeg Baklanou, rolabola, cube
Danny Wiles, slack wire
Jens and Maggie Larson, single trap, balancing
Ken Taylor, trapeze
Tim Doe, 24-hour man
Bill Metezer

The 1954 Fall Tour of the Greatest Show on Earth

By Bill Taggart

On Friday night, August 27, the three sections of the train were loaded and ready to make the jump into the great city of Chicago. The Chicago stand lasted from Saturday, August 28, through Sunday, September 5, and everyone on the show was looking for a break from the long series of one night stands. Razorbacks and truckers who loaded and unloaded the show each morning and night could rest and relax, and make necessary repairs on equipment. George Werner could give his loyal and hard working big top crew time to rest. Ring stock horses could be comfortable in the horse tops for several nights standing and resting on the picket lines instead of standing in the railroad stock cars.

On the nine day stand the lot was a quiet place after 11:00 p. m. when the only sounds came from the animals in the menagerie, the horses in the two horse tops, the purring of the diesel generators by the side show tent, and on both sides of the big top. Over in the menagerie department the elephants were also relaxing on their picket line chewing and tossing hay up on their backs while they seemed to enjoy the quiet of the late night hours on the circus lot. There was an unusual quietness on the lot on those summer evenings. A few watchmen strolled around for security reasons or sat drinking coffee from the grease joint parked in the back yard.

Performers, office staff, and most of the show personal stayed on the cars at nights, but a few headed for downtown Chicago hotels and restaurants. Carl Laun, Dick Brooks, and I found a cheap hotel not far from the lot where we enjoyed hot showers, comfortable beds, and occasional forays to mom and pop eating spots that stayed open late at night. We even managed to see two or three late night movies. One was *Human Desire* starring Glenn Ford and another was the *Paris Playboys* featuring the Bowery Boys.

When we first arrived in Chicago, I had my movie camera loaded and was able to stand up on a pedestrian bridge over the railroad tracks to take movies of show wagons being unloaded at the runs. I have always been proud of these unusual scenes of the unloading process. I also photographed small planes landing on Lake Michigan and speed boats skimming over the water. It was a great play for the show and all of us were enjoying the delightful scenery.

The show played Soldier Field's gravel parking lot at Roosevelt and Lake Shore Drive on the shores of Lake Michigan. We could walk to the Art Institute of Chicago which was a fine marble building with three spacious pavilions with Greek Ionic columns. These building and fountains were erected for the renowned World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. We were going to spend a week working on historic land; land with a rich history in the world of outdoor amusement business.

The 1893 Exposition was situated on 600 acres of lake shore property and designed by Daniel Burnham and Frederick Law Olmstead. It was here that George Ferris of Pittsburgh built his huge Ferris Wheel for a cost over \$400,000. It was constructed to rival the Eiffel Tower in Paris. It was estimated that over one and one half

million passengers rode the wheel for a fifty cent charge.

One day, when I was in the menagerie visiting with my pal Jackie Besser, he told me that Cracker Jacks were first introduced here in Chicago at the Exposition and that Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show played on land adjacent to the expo. I asked him if he was on that show and he laughed as said "It was just before my time, Bill, but I did know some guys who played here with Buffalo Bill in their younger days."



Four ticket wagons with signage. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise credited

For two shows a day for nine days we did big business. We had the best Chicago run in Ringling show history and that made us all proud. We were busy and if you were a clever ticket seller you could make some extra cash on the wild come ins as the patrons were anxious to pay a bit extra for good seats. Once doors were called, you could see a quiet, unassuming Tex Copeland walking up and down the hippodrome track carefully observing seats sales in the tent. Pete Grace and his crew of 40 ushers were also busy taking people to their seats. My favorite usher, Tommy Sumrall, was a busy guy working his center ring seats.

During the Chicago run we were able to see press agent Frank Braden and radio and TV press man Bev Kelley on the lot. Both men were thankful for the great business and excellent weather. During the early part of the run Bev was busy taking clowns for hospital visits to ill children and on to radio stations for interviews. Frank Braden was busy taking writers on tours of the back lot and to meet Emmett Kelly, Paul Jung, Felix Adler and Otto Griebing.

Braden and Kelly and many folks from the front office attended a meeting of the Harry Atwell Luncheon Club at the Sherman Hotel. The Club was founded by friends of the outstanding photographer Harry Atwell of Chicago and was a gathering place for circus and other show people in and around Chicago. As a young photographer Atwell tramped with the Ringlings and took outstanding photographs of roustabouts, big top crowds, side show people, and center ring stars. His collection of over 5,000 nega-

tives is now owned by the Circus World Museum.

Late one afternoon, I had a chance to take my camera and shoot scenes of the back yard between shows when all the spec floats were parked quietly and I got one good shot of Deacon Blanchfield driving a jeep around the back yard. He was the head of the truck department and a hard working, but outspoken, character loved by everyone of the show.

Between shows, one day I sat in the white ticket wagon office and visited with Noyelles Burkhart and Bill Reynolds, his assistant. Noyelles had played Chicago for years with the Cole Show and loved to tell stories of Chicago's minor gangsters who always liked circus people and loved to entertain them at small night clubs around the city. The mob guys could get the fix in when you needed to fix a problem in the Windy City, according to Noyelles.



Raising the 18 foot big top sidewall.

In Chicago former rider and now Shrine Circus producer Orrin Davenport threw his annual party for the circus performers. He always invited all the midgets, Frankie Saluto, Jimmy Armstrong, Jackie Gerlick, Prince Paul, Harry Klima, Carl Stephenes, Joe Harwath, and of course Paul Horompo. For one evening they all seemed to get along with each other.

Saturday, September 4, the cookhouse served a fine roast beef dinner and Carl Laun, Dick Brooks, Ralph Savage and I all ate a hearty meal. We were looking forward to "doors" and then when the final Saturday night performance was over, we were prepared to hit the downtown joints for a few beers. It was going to be our last night together as Carl and Dick were heading back to college on the following Monday morning.

On Sunday night, September 5, our nine day run was over and we were all ready to hit the road and get back to one day stands. Before we left town, I took my friends down to the railroad station, so they could head back to college, Carl to Geneva, New York, and Dick to Hiram College in the Western Reserve of Ohio. I was going to miss my friends and I did not realize that I might not ever see them again. I took a cab back to the show train and found the ushers' car where I had a comfortable bunk. Late that night the show trains headed out of Chicago on the Illinois Central railroad and jumped 130 miles to Madison, Wisconsin.

We played Madison on Monday, September 6, Labor Day, and the city had a true holiday spirit. The weather was fine, sunny warm weather and for most of us it seemed great to be on a new lot and a new state. Wisconsin had many circus fans and they were out and about from early morning until late at night visiting with show folks,

taking movies and enjoying the backyard activities as well as the fine performance. Sverre Braathen, an old friend of Edna Antes and her late husband Bill, was on the lot taking pictures as usual.

He and his lovely wife Faye were guests of Edna's for a baked chicken dinner in the cookhouse. After nine days in Chicago the whole show looked bright and fresh on the new Madison lot. I was always amazed how the appearance of the show changed from day to day depending on the type of lot we played. Some lots were grassy, some were sandy, and some were rough and rugged. I always thought that the best lots were on fairgrounds in the cities we showed.

From Madison on September 7 through Monday, September 13, the show marched up and across the beautiful state of Wisconsin. In Madison old timers talked about friends in Baraboo, the home of the Ringling brothers. We then moved south 30 miles to Janesville, then 86 miles north to Fond Du Lac. The weather was fine and business was good for every performance. The great center ring act Unus, "The man who stands on his Forefinger," slipped during his one finger stand on the giant globe and was out of the performance for two days. His wife Valentine and daughter Vicki cared for him.

After a jump of 35 miles we were in Appleton, Wisconsin on Thursday, September 9, and were greeted by rain and cool weather. It rained all day but audiences of young and old came out despite the weather to see the circus. It was about 60 degrees and to us this was cold. Everybody was digging out sweaters or jackets to wear. Between shows, I went to town to buy a pair of rubber boots and a heavy rain coat; a feeling of fall and heavy tramping was in the air.

That night the heavy wet canvas of big top fluttered to the ground when the side poles were pulled and men hurriedly unlaced the sections. For the first time in weeks ushers, candy butchers, and the big top crew struggled to fold and roll the wet and muddy sections of canvas. It took time to get the tent sections loaded into the waiting big top trucks. Men sweated, shouted and pulled until the work was finally done in the late night hours. Tired men ran to the buses for the haul back to the trains and for a cup of hot soup served by the porters. Some men even treated themselves to a shot of whiskey.

On September 10 we jumped 69 miles southeast to Sheboygan on the Chicago and North Western railroad where we were again on the shores of Lake Michigan. When we arrived in town the weather was in the forties and it was only in the sixties during the afternoon performance. The lot was muddy and I was pleased to own a new pair of rubber boots.

For the first time in weeks all of the ushers and ticket sellers wore their blue Brooks Brothers jackets while working in the big top. I felt warm and comfortable as I stood on my ticket box selling high back chair seats on the hippodrome track. The lot was slightly muddy, but wood shavings were spread around the track to make for easier walking. Between shows and after supper in the cookhouse, I spent my free time visiting with Alfred Burton and Dieter from the Fredonias' risley act. Alfred had a portable radio in his dressing area and we listened to pop music of Rosemary Clooney singing "This Old House" and the Chordettes singing "Mr. Sandman." "Three Coins in the Fountain," by the Three Aces was Dieter's favorite song at that time.

Saturday, September 11, found the show trains arriving in Green Bay early in the morning after a 61 mile haul on the CNW. The lot was a large field on the edge of town and along a state highway. After a breakfast of chipped beef on biscuits and hot coffee the ushers and ticket sellers waited for the tent poles to be guyed out, stakes to be driven, side poles dropped in place, and the large bundles of damp canvas to be unloaded in place. When it was time, we unrolled the heavy canvas, unfolded each section, and shook it out until it

could be laced and tied to the bale rings. George Werner let the fresh breeze and the morning sun dry out the canvas before it was hoisted into the air. There were lots of visitors on the lot all day to see the big show unfold and come to life. They kept the advance ticket wagon busy selling afternoon and evening performance tickets and we looked forward to a busy day in the small meat packing and paper mill city on Lake Michigan.

On September 12 we were in Wausau, ninety-one miles west of Green Bay. It was another chilly rainy day but in spite of the weather business was good. Wisconsin proved to be great circus country and it seemed that much of the audience came from summer camps and resorts in the lake country. Despite the rain, Bobby Hasson would grind away on his stage in front of the side show. It seemed that Harry Doll, Senorita Josephine, and the sword swallower Betty Bancroft were constantly out in front working on the bally platform and doing their best to bring in the customers. Somehow on a rainy damp day, wherever you were on the lot you could hear the strains of the circus band and the wonderful voice of Harold Ronk as he sang the lyrics of "Dreamland." I loved to stand in the connection between the menagerie and the hippodrome track and watch all my friends in their colorful Miles White costumes march past and smile at the audience and play their role in the "Dreamland" pageant.

On Monday, September 13, we moved 123 miles west on the Chicago North Western and arrived early in the morning in the railroad yards of Eau Claire. This was our last Wisconsin stand of the season and the show was mired deep in mud. Drivers struggled to pull the heavy show wagons onto the lot. Wagons became stuck and had to be pulled or pushed into position, and once the big top was standing teamsters found it difficult to spot all of the seat wagons in their respective positions. Caterpillar tractors tore up the sod as they struggled to move the wagons. Crowds of spectators stood around watching the spectacle and wondered if the show would ever be ready to open. By the time the show was ready to call doors it was late afternoon. Everyone was cold and tired but there were still two performances to be given.

It was cold and rainy all day and once the late matinee was over everybody headed to the cookhouse for cream of ham and pea soup, and macaroni and cheese dinner with hot bratwurst. The time between shows went fast, but for a few minutes I was able to huddle in the ticket distribution wagon with my friend Edna Antes and keep warm and dry.

Edna Antes.

That evening the performance was a real "John Robinson" and as the audience left for their homes



the loud sounds of the tear down took the place of the Merle Evans circus band. We rushed to tear down the bibles and stringers on the seat wagons and to move into position to pull the side wall poles. The grease joint did a good business of selling hot coffee and toasted sweet rolls and the "old doctor" walked among the workers selling little miniature bottles of whiskey.

When George Werner blew his whistle and the side wall poles were pulled, the heavy canvas top crashed to the ground; it was too heavy to flutter. Crews rushed to unlace the centers between the big top poles and untie the top from the huge baling rings. When this was finished it was an effort to fold the canvas and when as many men as possible gathered around the rolls of canvas they could not move it. Duffy from the elephant department was brought in with old Ruth. The bull leaned on her knees and with her giant head and trunk easily rolled the canvas. We were amazed at her ability and strength. When she finished the job she was given a shot of whiskey and Duffy, her handler, was given a tip from the thankful ushers.

This circus scene reminded me of the lines of a poem written years before by F. Beverly Kelly noted press agent and printed in the 1940 Program:

"Struggle in the rain and muck until you're almost dead;
High adventure waiting in the towns that lie ahead,
Soggy canvas, wagons in the mire up to the hubs,
Manhouts shouting, 'Move it Modoc! Ruth and Bess, you duds!
Don't you know we're late, I got a hundred miles to run?'
Got to get it loaded and be in before the sun.
Let it rain and let it pour, let it freeze and blow,
Keep the 'old rag' in the air and give the folks a show!"

Late at night Tommy Cropper parked the show bus by the light plant and we all headed to the awaiting bus and onto the train. Our eight day tour of Wisconsin was over.

Tuesday morning, September 14, we had a run of 158 miles to Winona, Minnesota on the Chicago North Western railroad. The three sections of the circus train arrived early in the railroad yards and, of course, the cookhouse, menagerie, and side show wagons were first to be unloaded from the first section. Almost before sunrise the 60 member cookhouse crew was spreading the cookhouse canvas, opening up the stoves, ovens, refrigerator wagons, putting up all of the tables in the tent, and preparing to boil hot coffee, fry up sausage and bacon, stir up the grits, and fry the hash browns and of course fry hundreds of eggs. It was a cool misty morning with the temperature in the forties. The first men to arrive for breakfast were the big top crew and slightly later the ring stock crew.

It was a cool day with the temperature never getting over 50 degrees. Once again it was sweater and jacket weather and it appeared to us that fall was here. Our one day stand in Minnesota was not memorable. Few spectators were out on the cold night to watch the show being torn down or at the runs to see the train being loaded.

Wednesday, September 15, found us traveling 120 miles on the Milwaukee Railroad to the small city of Dubuque, Iowa. We would show for the next 12 days and 24 performances in Iowa. In Dubuque we would again be on the banks of the Mississippi River. Then we would travel southwest on the Illinois Central road eighty-eight miles to Cedar Rapids to play there on the 16th. The 17th found us moving sixty-five miles southeast on the Rock Island Line again to the banks of the Mississippi at Davenport.

It was a warm, sunny day when we played Davenport. In the morning Theo Forstall and Bobby DeLochte sat in the cookhouse talking about the many times they had played the river town. They also knew that the son of the founder of the Palmer College of Chiropractic, B. J. Palmer, was a circus fan and a collector of old circus parade wagons.

Merle Evans, Frank Sering, Max Ring, Lew Bader, Andy Grainger and other band members sat around before the matinee talking about the talented jazz trumpet Bix Beiderbecke, who grew up in Davenport. Merle also talked of his friend B. J. Palmer. We had a good matinee and an excellent evening performance. Every-

one on the show enjoyed the weather and the lot, which was the Great Mississippi Valley Fairgrounds.

September 18 we moved 93 miles south on the Rock Island Line to Burlington, Iowa. It was here that the talented and beautiful Mary Jane Miller left the show to return home to Sarasota and await the birth of her first baby. Mary Jane had been on the show for fourteen years. When she joined out she was Mary Jane De Young of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Mary Jane was a talented and beautiful North starlet and worked spec, aerial ballet, ménage, and finale. She also assisted Pat Valdo as a part time secretary. Later she would assist Antoinette Concello when she directed the aerial ballet. Mary Jane also found time to write "Under the Marquee" for *Billboard* magazine. When I first met Mary Jane she was the wife of Dick Miller, assistant front door manager and show photographer. Emerick Moroski left the show and his family the same day for Sarasota and back to high school for his kids.

We then headed northwest to Ottumwa on the CB&Q railroad, a distance of 74 miles. I ate a bowl of chili and had a cold beer before going to my bed in the back of the car. For some reason I was tired and the colicky click of the train sent me quickly to sleep. In the morning of the 17th some of my usher pals and I found a little restaurant not far from the railroad yards. The mom and pop place served a nice breakfast and gave us a chance to visit with some of the locals. That day we had a good matinee crowd and a light Sunday night audience. I was beginning to get bored with Iowa.

We jumped 70 miles northwest on the Rock Island Line and arrived in the Des Moines railroad yards very early. As this was the state capitol and a very political town, Noyelles Burkhart was off the train as soon as we were in town to visit the City Hall and the Police Department with passes for the show. Good weather and fine business made September 20 a fine day.

We then headed back east one hundred and twenty miles on the RI Railroad. From there a trip of 105 miles northwest to Iowa City was followed by Waterloo, a run of 105 miles. I had a map in my bunk on the train and marked the route each night so that I would have some idea of where I was. By this time in the season every one of the towns looked alike. After all you were only seeing the railroad yard, the road to the lot, the lot and then at night back to the train. Midwesterners made great audiences. They were delighted to see the circus, and circus day tended to be a big event in every city. Everyone on the show enjoyed playing the Midwest.

From Waterloo to Johnson City. September 23 through October 9.

From Waterloo, Iowa the show jumped 83 miles on the Rock Island Line to Mason City for two performances on Thursday, September 23. This was the heartland of America according to old clown Arthur M. Burson, who told me on the bus that morning that he had played the town for many years with Ringling and other shows. There were good crowds to see the train arrive and watch the unloading of the wagons and stock. When we arrived at the lot there were also lots of lot lice and punks looking for work tickets. This made Pete Grace head usher and chief punk pusher very pleased. Extra punks helped with the canvas and seat wagons work. We did good business that night and after an uneventful tear down we were ready to move farther west to on next spot.

By early morning of Friday, September 24, the three sections of the show train were spotted in the rail road yards of Fort Dodge, Iowa. They had completed a jump of 94 miles on the Illinois Central. Dick McGrath was busy overseeing the unloading process at the time as I walked up the tracks from our car to the runs with ticket sellers Tommy Reale and Joe Bainbridge.

Merle Evans was looking forward to playing the town as it was

the home of famous bandmaster and composer Karl King, a friend of Merle's for years. King and directed bands on Barnum and Bailey, Sells-Floto, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West. The two musicians had a great deal in common and Merle Evans used many of Karl King's marches in his circus programs.

We did good business at each performance and I enjoyed working the ticket box on the long side of the big top during the come in. "I got high back chair seats, it's a two hour performance," was my pitch and with a friendly smile and bit of encouragement I was able to sell some rows of seats to people who were not happy with the back bleachers or blues. Once in a while I could hype the ticket price fifty cents by saying that I had some special reserved seats right down front. My pitch worked especially well in a good house and when ticket buyers were afraid that they would not be able to get special seats. One night when I was working especially hard at my pitch I looked over and there was Buddy North standing there listening and watching. He smiled and I knew he knew what my game was. He never said a word; he smiled and walked away. He was a realist and knew that men on the show worked hard and had to make a few dollars. Like everyone on the show, I respected and appreciated Henry Ringling North.



Unloading two of the grandstand chair seat wagons.

On the early morning hours of Saturday, September 25, we jumped 138 miles due west on the Illinois Central to Sioux City, Iowa on the banks of the wide Missouri. This was once part of the Louisiana Purchase and explored by Lewis and Clark. Now the Ringling show was in town doing a little exploring of our own. This was the home of the American Popcorn Company, founded in 1914. They created the trademark "Jolly Time Popcorn." After the two Saturday performances were over the townspeople of Sioux City returned to their quiet homes and we boarded the three silver and red trains and moved south to another city. I am sure that there were youngsters still dreaming of their visit to the circus for many days to come and perhaps recalling the great spec "Dreamland" or trying to figure out how the amazing Unis was able to stand on one finger atop his glass globe.

Sunday, September 26, we were in Council Bluffs, Iowa, after a move of 98 miles on the CNW railroad. That early morning you could look out of the car windows to see the Missouri River as the train headed south. The temperature was in the low fifties in the morning and the mid-eighties during the day. We had great weather for two performances and a good house for the matinee but it was a bit light for the evening show. I remember standing by Paul Fisher's hot dog joint on the midway and watching the sun settle over the western landscape that evening. It was a scene I will never forget as I was beginning to feel a bit lonesome for home and the East. It was from Council Bluffs that the Mormon wagon trains set out for Salt Lake City and I could only imagine their feelings as they started their trek to the Great Salt Lake. Our circus trains would be on a trek to Sarasota, Florida in a few months.

Monday, September 27, we headed south 128 miles on the CB&Q railroad to St. Joseph, Missouri. Everyone on the show was looking

forward to playing this date and then moving on to Kansas City where the big show would be for two great days. Before I left the train that morning I had packed my laundry bag for my porter. I wanted clean, fresh duds for Kansas City to be on my bed that night when I returned to the train.

Show Treasurer Theo Forstall remarked on the bus that morning, "Well fellas were in the town where the Pony Express was born and Jessie James died. I hope we don't die here." Show cashier and silver wagon man Bobby De Lochte said, "No, this has always been a good show town, Sells- Floto did great business here." Sure enough Bobby was right again and we did do good business.

That afternoon after the show started I walked along the outside of the tent and all the show girls were hanging out laundry in the Missouri sunshine. Guess they were getting ready for Kansas City also. I met Dieter with the Fredonias and Alfred Burton at the backyard grease joint and we agreed to share a hotel room for our one night in Kansas City. We were looking forward to a night at the movies or a visit to a burlesque show. Circus boys will be circus boys.

Tuesday, September 28, we jumped 64 miles on the CB&Q railroad into the freight yards of Kansas City. Although the large stockyards had been destroyed by a flood in 1951 the smaller yards still had a cattle smell and we knew we were "in town" as our section came to a halt. I left my railroad car to find a cab to town. I kept singing that refrain from the musical *Oklahoma* "Everything's up to date it Kansas City." My job was to get to town and find a cheap room in a hotel for my buddies and I to share. Usually we could find a Manger Hotel downtown near the restaurants and movie houses.

I found the show's advance sale downtown ticket office set up in a Rexall Drug store. "Iodine," as we called him, or in real life Richard Iannone, was there with his reserved seat tickets and a diagram of the reserved seat sections. He told about the hotel where he was staying and that I could get a show rate by using his name. Within an hour I had rented a room for the night and hailed a cab to the lot. I met Edna Antes at her ticket distribution center between the kid show banner line and found her happy as a lark. Edna told me that Arthur M. Concello was on the lot and stopped by to see her. Edna was fond of Concello, after her days trouping with him on the Russell Bros. Circus.

Edna and I hurried to the cookhouse for lunch and then I went on to the band top to change into my ticket seller's uniform. As always Maxie was full of wise cracks and Merle Evans was sitting up at his place in the wagon going over fan mail and visiting with his men. Merle was right at home in Kansas and as always had lots of visitors.

Before doors I met my boss, Bill McGough, and the rest of the inside ticket sellers at the front end blues. It was a cheerful group: John McGuire, William McAleer, Joe Bainbridge, Tommy Reale, and Louis "Red" Flanagan. We received our tickets, banded the rows, kibitzed a bit, and headed to our ticket boxes for the come in.

The two performances couldn't go by fast enough for me and since it might be a late night, I change into civilian clothes at the wardrobe top and found a spot under the blues where I could stretch out and nap on a section of unused sidewall. When I awoke the matinee was over and I headed to the cookhouse with Joe Bainbridge and Tommy Reale. After dinner, we all sat around the band top cutting up jackpots until almost 6:30. Then it was time to freshen up and head to the big top.

That evening we had a great house but the show dragged on for me. It seemed like Trevor Bales cat act went on forever. I couldn't wait for him to ask the cat "to go home please." That was the finish of his act. Alfred Burton's act was in display 21 and the Fredonia

Family was in display 23. All my pals were in the finale "UN" and they had to change into street clothes. I had a cab waiting for us and suddenly, after a long day, we were heading into town, all hungry for a cold beer and some Kansas City barbecue.

On the morning of Wednesday, September 29, I awoke early and after breakfast in the hotel caught a cab to the lot. My pals stayed in the hotel for a late check out. I thought good for them, nice to be a hooligan. The final day in Kansas City was uneventful and after Count Nicholas bid the audience goodbye the noise of the tents being torn down began.



A decorated tiger cage in the menagerie. Richard J. Reynolds photo.

Thursday, September 30, we moved into Lawrence, Kansas on the AT&SF railroad. The next day we moved 149 miles on the same line to Pittsburg, Kansas. Late that night and early in the morning of October 2 the three sections headed south east on the Frisco line to Springfield, Missouri in the heart of the Ozarks. The jump was 108 miles.

We showed on beautiful grassy fairgrounds and there were hundreds of spectators out to see the show arrive and set up. The afternoon and night performances were both sell outs and the candy butchers were delighted.

Mel Hamlin, the candy top manager, was constantly busy checking the 28 seat butchers in and out. Maxie Miller and his crew in the frozen custard wagon could hardly keep up with the rush. Jimmy Littler, Bob Dover's first circus boss, kept his crew popping corn and rushing the trays of bagged popcorn into the big top. Money was to be made and that is what the circus business is really about.

Dick Slayton and his crew at the kid show balleyed all day and moved the crowds in and out of the circus side show. The inside attractions were delighted with their sales of postcards. Meeks, the cheerful colored porter at the ticket wagons, worked hard to keep ticket buyers in line and to bring change from the silver wagon to the various ticket sellers. The circus midway was crowded all day and even after the evening show started there were crowds standing around. That night after I finished at my ticket box I spent the rest of the evening with Rudy Bundy at the front door. Then I went to help Edna record the night sales. We had a banner circus day in

Springfield; one that will stay in my memory forever.

That evening the men worked hard at the runs to load the three sections for a long "duckie run" to Memphis, Tennessee. Show folks gathered outside the train and some watched the ushers and candy butchers hard at work playing a fast crap game. They were loaded with cash after two sell out shows. I spent my time visiting with some usher pals and listening to my portable Motorola radio.

About 1:00 a.m. the Frisco line was ready to start the long 283 mile run to Memphis. Sunday, October 3, the show trains rolled south east over the Frisco Line through the southern Ozarks into the north east corner of Arkansas and on to the east bank of the Mississippi River at West Memphis. As we rolled long the rural countryside we could see southern sharecropper cabins, small towns that a large circus would never play, and even families driving teams of mules along the dusty country roads.

Our porters keep busy selling sandwiches, cold drinks, and beers and enjoyed the long run. The cookhouse supplied us all with duckie boxes with ham and cheese sandwiches, an orange, a can of sardines, and a small slice of spice cake. We finally crossed the Frisco Bridge, built in 1892, over the mighty Mississippi. At the time of its construction it was the longest bridge in the United States. By late afternoon the trains arrived in the Memphis railroad yards and the show was unloaded.

Monday, October 4, we were in Memphis and if I remember correctly the lot was close to town and near a ball field. I was up early, and headed to town. Edna Antes went with me as we had arranged a breakfast with press agent Frank Braden at the famous Peabody Hotel.

Frank, like everyone on the show, was fond of Edna and I was just lucky to be invited to tag along. I knew of the hotel because I use to listen to remote radio broadcasts from hotels across the country on New Year's Eves during the war years. There was always a big band program from the Peabody. I remember one with Tommy Dorsey and the Andrews Sisters.

We arrived and were there at 11:00 a.m. when the famous Peabody ducks marched out of the elevator, across the lobby on a red carpet and jumped into the marble fountain to the music of John Phillips Sousa's King Cotton March. Frank told Edna, "It has been said that the Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of the Peabody and ends at Catfish Row in Vicksburg, Mississippi." After our Eggs Benedict breakfast and some department store shopping for Edna we caught a cab to the lot.

Besides the Peabody ducks my last memory of Memphis was standing outside the big top on a ticket box selling reduced price tickets to late, late arrivals. The marquee had been torn down and Baldy made a slight opening in the side wall for an entrance. As I stood there trying to collect some late cash for the show Rudy and I would chat about his years on the road with his dance band. He loved to chat about his musical career and the famous band leaders he had known. I liked to ask him about Ted Lewis from Circleville, Ohio and his old high hat and his signature "Is Everybody Happy?" Rudy was a friend of Ted's. We had two turn away shows in Memphis even though we "day and dated" the Mid-South Fair.

On Tuesday, October 5, we moved across western Tennessee and north to Jackson. It was an 85 mile move on the NC&StL railroad. The Nashville and Chattanooga & St. Louis Railroad was founded in the 1870s. We traveled on the line for three days. Bobby DeLoche, our history buff, told me that Jackson was the home of famous Illinois Central railroad engineer Casey Jones. Jones was made famous by his death in 1900 in Vaughn, Mississippi when his Engine No. 1 on the New Orleans Special couldn't be stopped and ploughed into a north bound train. It was April 30 and shortly there-

after his friend, Wallace Saunders, an African American engine wiper, began to sing the "Ballad of Casey Jones."

Between shows Edna and Nina Evans had a little birthday party for me complete with a large cake and Jackie Besser's famous orange aide. Alfred Burton and friends gave me a Hickock tie clasp with a small pearl attached. I still have the clasp and cuff links 55 years later. We had a half house in the afternoon and we were almost full at night.

Fall was in the air and with the higher elevations we were beginning to get cooler days. The cool weather was welcome. On Wednesday, October 6, we made a 152 mile jump into Nashville and then jumped 147 miles southeast to Chattanooga for two shows on Thursday, October 7. Both the runs were on the Nashville and Chattanooga and St. Louis Line and through scenic countryside.



Some of the sideshow banners painted by Bill Ballantine. Richard J. Reynolds photo.

The railroad yards in Chattanooga were not far from the center of the town and I was able to share a cab with some ushers to town. We headed for a YMCA for hot showers and a swim before returning to the lot. We noticed a Buddy North's Cadillac was parked down the street from a large pool hall and we all knew that the boss was in there taking on the local pool sharks. On these adventures into towns he always dressed down as he found a bit of relaxation away from the hub-bub of the show. Frenchie, an older usher, and great pool shark, would sometimes meet him there to take on the locals.

This day as we headed back to the lot we spotted the show's large "honey wagon" parked in front of a local grease joint. Charlie Carter, the driver, and his assistant Rufus Brown were inside enjoying a late breakfast. You could smell the "honey" far down the street. We all had a good laugh and hoped that Buddy North would not see them.

On the early hours of the morning of Friday, October 8, the SOU Railroad hauled us 111 miles to Knoxville. The show was heading into the Great Smokey Mountains, Bluegrass Country and the land of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Noyelles Burkhart was up early to take care of city hall from the Mayor's office to the water, police and health departments.

I was amazed when I arrived on the lot. It was on a hillside and you looked up from the midway to the big top and up still higher was the back yard and cookhouse. Indeed it was a strange sight, one that I was not used to seeing. Inside the tent you could easily see the third ring high above the first ring. We were lucky, however, as it was a nice grassy lot and we showed to capacity crowds.

In the wee hours of the morning of Saturday, October 9, we

moved northeast deep into the Appalachian Mountains. It was a run of 106 miles on the SO Railroad. For many days in a row we had runs of well over a hundred miles each night. In the early morning hours we arrived in Johnson City. We were actually playing the Tri Cities of Johnson City, Kingsport, and Bristol. They came out of the cities and mountains to see the circus. We experienced warm days and cool nights in the heart of the mountains.

On that early fall morning off rolled the cookhouse and dining equipment and cook house tent. The cookhouse had to be moved quickly to the lot because breakfast had to be made. Workers were hungry. The commissary wagon, horse shoeing, harness making, and blacksmith departments and ring stock equipment and tent were all waiting to be hauled to the show grounds. The menagerie cages rolled down the runs along with the giraffe wagons. Ring stock grooms opened the doors of stock cars 101, 102, and 103, lowered the ramps, and watched as the sixty or more horses appeared one at a time and walked down the ramp to the awaiting grooms. The grooms then mounted their horses and rode to the lot. The horses hurried along as they knew that hay and water would be waiting for them as well as a morning of rest.

The 1954 Ringling-Bar-num elephant herd.



At another cut the show trucks, tractors, caterpillars, stake driving machines and their operators came down the runs to the street and prepared to haul equipment to the lot. Long lines of spectacle floats were hauled from flat car to flat car and then down the runs and parked while awaiting the long haul. Finally off rolled the big show ticket wagons, office wagon, side show tent, and banner line wagons, all waiting to be hauled down the streets of Johnson City. All this was done while crowds of spectators looked on

October 10 Run to Roanoke Virginia.

On Sunday, October 10, we had another duckie run of 175 miles on the Norfolk and Western Railroad. We moved east over the Great Smokey Mountains and into the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. All day the scenery was colorful as fall was in the air and the colors on the hillsides were as bright as those on the circus wagons. The silver railroad cars appeared majestic as they glided around the curves and over the hills. I spent most of the day sleeping and trying to pick up some country music on my portable radio.

The show arrived in town late in the afternoon and there was time for show folks to visit local restaurants and see a Sunday night movie. I went out to dinner with Edna, Theo Forstall, and Bobby DeLochte. Theo always wanted to find a Chinese restaurant when he went out. We enjoyed a pleasant meal and fine conversation. Theo loved to talk about the old days on Gentry Brothers with Red Sonnenberg, Everett and Mrs. James, and their son Harry. Bobby was always thinking of his good times on Sells-Floto and his friendship with Buffalo Bill.

On October 11 we played two shows with good houses and by nightfall we were preparing to head north to Staunton, Virginia. As the spectators walked out of the big top they were given a quick bally at the side show and a fast tour inside the kid show. It was a quick tear down and a short haul to the runs.

Our trains arrived in the Staunton Railroad Yards on October 12. We had made the 109 miles north on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad through the beautiful Shenandoah Valley. This was an eventful trip as the first section had to stop in a town when Willie

Carr, the elderly 24 hour man, suffered a heart attack. He was rushed back to a hospital in Roanoke.

Willie Carr had trouped with the Ringling for many seasons and luckily he recovered and was back at his duties in a few weeks. The three sections arrived a bit late in town but the show went on.

October 13 found the show heading east into Charlottesville, Virginia on the C&O. It was a short jump of only 41 miles and Benny White of the elephant department joked that they could leave early with the bulls and beat the train into town. We did great business in both Staunton and Charlottesville as they were new cities for the show.

In the morning hours of October 14 we moved on the C&O 97 miles to Richmond, Virginia. I was looking forward to a two-day stand there as my mother was coming to visit with a friend of hers. They were looking forward to a nice visit. Our trains were parked near the lot and the show was set up next to a ballpark. After I finished tossing bibles and setting up seats I headed to the band top to clean up and shave. Doc Higgins came looking for me to tell me that

my Mom had arrived with her friend. We had a chat beside the vet's wagon and walked through the horse tops to see the stock. Then Doc and I took our guests to lunch at the cook-

house. We had a favorite meal of mashed potatoes, green beans, and meatloaf.

That afternoon my mom and her guest enjoyed the performance. After the matinee I convinced Edna Antes to come for a quick supper with us and we headed to a little Greek joint down the street. We headed back to the lot, walked down the midway and I went into Edna's wagon to help her divide the tickets for the night show. I sent my mom and her guest into see Frieda Pushnik and her mom at the kid show. I took them into the big top before doors and had them seated comfortably in a good section for the night show.

That night, after I finished work, we walked down the street to a small motel where we hoped to have a good night's rest. I was concerned as there had been talk back on the show that a wild hurricane named Hazel was coming up the Atlantic Coast. I watched the television news and weather and told my mom that we were in for a difficult day. It was not easy to sleep that night and I was up at six in the morning, called a cab and took my company to the bus station for their trip back to Auburn, New York. Before long, I was back at the lot and ate a cookhouse breakfast of bacon, eggs and grits with my friend Doc Higgins.

Doc was concerned about Hazel hitting us as he knew that all the horses were restless on the picket line in their tents. The side walls were lowered and tied down to keep out the wind. Soon the word spread like wild fire around the lot that the shows were cancelled and that everyone had to pitch in to pack the Greatest Show on Earth into its wagons.

I had never participated in an early morning tear down or one that went so quickly. The big top crew, electrical crew, ring stock men, prop men, butchers, performers, electricians, everyone, set about the chore of packing up the show. By mid morning the wind was picking up in velocity and before the tent was lowered the side wall poles were dancing. As soon as the 26 steel seat wagons were hauled out of the tent, the side wall poles were pulled, and the canvas was lowered. It was difficult to unlace the sections and fold and roll the canvas sections. We were constantly fighting the wind.

Orders were given to march the elephants and horses to the stock cars where they would be away from danger and feel safe. All of the other wagons were parked in tightly packed rows on the lot. Management hoped that they would survive the storm.

By early afternoon the winds increased from 60 to 79 miles an hour. The barometer dropped to 28.75 and set a new record for that time. Over fifty homes lost their roofs; there was some flooding, and several deaths. Hazel had hit landfall near Myrtle Beach and marched on to Richmond at a speed of 50 miles per hour. After Richmond it moved north, doing damage as far north as Toronto. It proved to be one of the deadliest storms of the 20th century.

The show personnel sought refuge in our steel railroad cars. Porters prepared meals, and we sat out the storm. Our long, heavy cars rocked back and forth in the wind and we looked through the windows to see the giant steel light poles of the ballpark sway, crack, and slam to the ground. Small sheds were blown to pieces and flew by our train.

The city of Richmond was in complete darkness but we were lucky enough to have generators on the train to supply limited lights. I had my Motorola radio with me on the train and could listen to the local news.

Late that night show General Manager Frank McClosky gave orders to start loading the show for the trip to Norfolk, Virginia. We had no idea of the devastation that would lie ahead.

Friday, October 16, the three sections were slowly loaded and the Norfolk & Western Railroad started the 108 mile route to Norfolk. When we arrived a bit late the sky was blue, and the weather was fine. Hurricane Hazel was long gone. As we stood in the rail yards we could see the devastation. Electric and telephone wires were down, trees blown over with some even uprooted. When Larry Wilcox pulled the bus up for loading I boarded with Nena and Merle Evans. As we drove down streets public works crews and power crews were out repairing the damage. With devastation like this Merle did not think we would have two days of good houses. He was right.

After the show that night I headed to town with Alfred and we took in a late movie and enjoyed steak and eggs at an all-night diner. The fleet must have been in, as I had never seen so many sailors in my life. They were walking the streets, going in and out of the bars and strip joints, and just having a fun night. On Sunday, October 17, Tex Copeland and my old front door boss Dick Miller left for Sarasota. Dick was anxious to join his pregnant wife Mary Jane.

The next day we moved out of Virginia on the Atlantic Coast Line and headed into Rocky Mount, North Carolina, a run of 116 miles. We were getting into tobacco country and cooler days. It was in the low thirties in the morning and in the seventies later in the day. The circus top was beginning to look dusty and dark as was the well used side wall sections.

After the morning set up, I walked down the road to a Carolina barbecue joint and shared barbecued ribs with my usher pals. On this cool day I was happy to wear my Ticket Sellers uniform that afternoon and evening. Between shows I sat with Felix and Amelia Adler along the tent stake line. Big band leader Kay Kyser stopped by to visit with Felix and I was able to meet the Professor from the College of Musical Knowledge. I had enjoyed his radio program for many years. Luckily, I had my camera on the lot and was able to take some back yard scenes that evening, a good shot of Emmett in street clothes, the Bale children playing with their pet bunny, and the Fredonias warming up their risley act. Around the show people were beginning to talk about the November 28 closing in Miami.

Tuesday, October 19, we moved into Goldsboro, North Carolina. We were now on the Atlantic coastal plain and had a beautiful

grassy lot for the show. Felix had told me that this was the home of old time tramp clown Hermann Joseph. Anytime I think of this city I recall his funny tramp make up and recollect reading about him in the old *Hobbies* magazine. I believe his last clowning was on the Mills Brothers Circus. My friend Joe Flynn of ring stock was kicked by a horse and had to be hospitalized.

On October 20 we moved 74 miles into Durham, and the next day we were in Winston-Salem, a jump of 73 miles. On Friday, October 22, a short 27 mile run took us into Greensboro, North Carolina. All these jumps were on the South Carolina Railroad.

During this time clown Frank Cromwell and band man Lew Bader celebrated birthdays. It was so cold that evening that the big top crew huddled around a large bonfire at the edge of the lot. It was fall and there was frost in the air.

In the early hours of October 23 we headed north on the SOU line, a 43 mile jump. We were playing one more date back in Virginia.

Danville was a textile city with Danville Fabrics being the largest textile factory in the United States. It was also tobacco country. It was here that the "Wreck of Old 97," a crack mail train, took place in 1903. The accident became celebrated in country music, paintings and folklore.

I did not know it at the time but it was here that a young Danville high school boy named Kenny Dodd spent the day watching the gigantic circus come to life. He was thrilled by the great acts like the Yong Brothers and Sisters, Con Colleano on the slack wire, the wire walking and juggling of Dieter Tasso, Victor Julian's dressy dog act, the music, wardrobe, and spectacular floats of the "Dreamland" spec, and the beautiful Pinito Del Oro working on the high trapeze during the "Rocket to the Moon" aerial ballet.

Kenny was also impressed by the antics of the Ringling Clown Alley. He watched with delight as Paul Jung's "Military Misfits" performed their sad sack routine in duck colored army uniforms complete with helmets. He watched the great clown Paul Wenzel stroll along the hippodrome track with his entire trunk full of gags including the fishing pole and giant fish, the large walking duck and comic giant glasses with windshield wipers attached. Like everyone he had to laugh at the funny Gene Lewis strutting along in high heels, a tight form fitting dress and constantly looking into a mirror at his wild clown face with the big red nose. Kenny did not see the talented clown Otto Griebing that day as Otto had left to visit the Mayo Clinic and then went home to St. Louis for rest.



Billboard advertising the 1954 Atlanta engagement. Richard J. Reynolds photo.

Little did Kenny know on that fall day that a few years later he would learn a trapeze act from Ringling aerialist Albert Powell or that later he would become a producing clown on the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus. After years of trouping along the sawdust trail he

retired to Sarasota and become a great friend to the who's who of the circus world.

After the matinee, Walter Kernan, assistant manager, met me in the backyard and said, "Bill, go to town today and load up with movie film. On our way to Ashville tomorrow you will be able to film on of the most scenic railroad trips of the season. We will travel over the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina."

Walter Kernan, assistant manager.



Sunday, October 24, we were en route to Ashville, a jump of 238 miles on the SOU railroad. As Walter Kernan suggested, I had my Keystone movie camera loaded and was able to shoot great scenes of our train climbing over the hills and curves on the mountains. At one spot I filmed three teenage country lads, standing at a rural crossing, happily waving at the long circus train. A bit later I filmed the front of our train going around a long curve and then I could see the train, loaded with all of its red wagons, climbing up the side of a mountain.

It was the most scenic run of the season. We arrived in Ashville late in the day and found our way to the circus lot where there were hundreds of spectators watching the circus set up. With some fast work the wagons were spotted, and the Ringing Bros. and Barnum & Bailey flags were flying proudly.

That Sunday evening the restaurants and hotel lobbies of Ashville were crowded with circus folks. About everyone on the show went to see the Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rear Window* starring Jimmy Stewart, Grace Kelly, Thelma Ritter, and a young Raymond Burr. It was a psychological thriller. Some performers had met Raymond Burr when the actor visited the show in Cleveland earlier in the season. Alfred Burton was happy to have a day off after falling during his act in Danville.

The next day we had turn away crowds for both performances. I remember Jackie Besser at the No. 1 menagerie stand telling me that he had once showed Ashville when snow was falling on the big top. By this time my pal Doc Higgins was in warm Sarasota with elephant man Louie Reed, caring for and training twenty new bulls. The punks were named Raja, Jennie, Fanny, Moto, Suzanne, Pinky, Mary, Cass, Henry, Calcutta, Siam, Luna, Lucy, Betty, Dale, Misore, Trixie, Cutie, Eva, and India. Doc Higgins and Louis Reed had their work cut out for them.

On Tuesday, October 26, we jumped into Spartanburg, South Carolina with Greenville on Wednesday and Charlotte on the 28th. Friday the 29th we were in Columbia, South Carolina. All of these runs were on the SOU line.

We had to change lots in Columbia as the all Negro South Fair was in progress and the circus had to be at least five miles away according to a county ordinance. By this time 24 hour man Willie Carr was back at work and his replacement Doc Hall was on his way to Sarasota to end his season.

Saturday, October 30, at Greenwood was our last date in South Carolina and the spirit of Halloween was in the air. We had made a jump of 83 miles when we landed in town that morning. There were black ladies selling ribs and chicken at the runs and they stayed

there late into the evening. Agnes Stewart, porter of the girl's car, held a surprise party for the show girls after the evening performance.

On Sunday, October 31, we jumped 214 miles south on the SOU & C&G lines to Atlanta. It was a restful day as everyone on the show was a bit tired and needed rest. I stretched out in my cozy bunk and napped the entire day. The season was getting long.

Monday morning, November 1, I arose early and went to town with friends. I had never been to Atlanta and wanted to see Peachtree Street and do some shopping. I found a trendy haberdashery store and purchased a fine pair of grey flannel trousers. I knew were we in for chilly days in the Deep South.

On November 2 we made a jump of 108 miles on the SOU&LAN lines to Anniston, Alabama. The city is in the southern most part of the Blue Ridge Mountains, west of Atlanta. In this steel city it was 38 degrees in the morning and 45 during the day. With the cold it was difficult for the performers to work and uncomfortable for the animals. The herd of elephants tossed dirt and hay on their backs all day just to keep warm and the ring stock horses were blanketed. This proved to be the coldest day of my circus career and one of the most uncomfortable. That night when we returned to the trains we found that our water pipes were frozen. It was a rough night for sleeping, even with two army blankets.

November 3 we moved 30 miles on the L&N road to Gadsden, Alabama. It was still cold and dreary and that night I was able to hitch a ride with Walter McClosky, head of the program department. We found an all night diner before checking into an old hotel. At last we were warm.

That night we had a 145 mile run northwest to Decatur on the L&N, and then a 85 mile jump on the same line to Birmingham on Friday, November 5. The Dixie weather was cold for us in northern Alabama, but we did have a straw house that night. People packed the big top, even though there was a slight drizzle and the temperature was in the thirties.

On November 6 we were heading west 55 miles on the SOU-IC road to Tuscaloosa. We were well aware of the University of Alabama and were pleased to see students come out in force to see the show. Word reached us that Frank Braden, veteran press agent, was out of the Sarasota Hospital and back on the road.

Sunday, November 7, we headed out of chilly Alabama to Natchez, Mississippi on the Illinois Central railroad. Again, it was a duckie run of 291 miles. My box lunch contained a banana, can of sardines, two ham and cheese sandwiches, and the usual frosted spice cake. The weather was warm. Here we were once again on the east bank of the Mississippi, but this time many miles south of Memphis.

We were in the Deep South now and I filmed a black peddler driving a mule down the main street as he peddled his wagon load of greens.

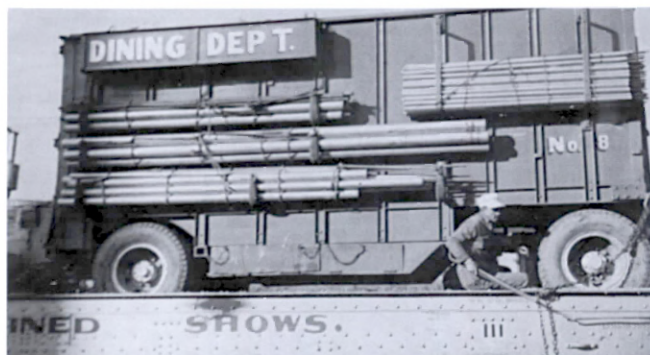
After the show made it to the lot and was up many people went to town for a fine restaurant meal and to see the highly praised film *Brigadoon*. The small movie house was packed with circus folks. Later that night some of the ushers hailed cabs and made a trip to one of the city's "good time houses."

On Monday, the 8th, we had a fair matinee and a good evening house. Late that night we moved out of town on the IC railroad and went northeast to Jackson. We were starting to hop scotch back across the state. On the 9th in Jackson we showed to one half house matinee and three quarter at night. As Jackson was the state capitol many of the locals were in on passes. The candy butchers always complained that the political crowd in on passes never spent money.

Wednesday November 10, the IC and SOU railroads hauled the

show into Hattiesburg. At the runs that cool morning after the first section was unloaded and on the way to the lot, men started to move the second section down the runs. As people watched, the big top wagons moved off the train as did the wardrobe and horse tops wagons. The long heavy pole wagon made its way down the runs and onto the street as did the stake wagons, wagons full of props, and powerful diesel generator wagons. They were followed by all the trucks and tractors, the light dept wagons, and ten long steel seat wagons.

As this was happening the nine herds of elephants calmly stepped out of their two cars under the direction of their handlers and started a long procession to the lot. At the same time hundreds of working men came out of their coaches and climbed aboard wagons, trucks, and other equipment to hitch a ride to the lot and on to the cookhouse. Ushers, ticket sellers, property department men greeted the day and found their way to the cookhouse.



A cookhouse wagon on a flat car. Richard J. Reynolds photo.

Finally the sanitation department trucks and the donnicker wagons came off the train as well as several concession trucks and wagons. There were eighteen long flat cars, eight coaches, and the two elephant cars.

Finally the nineteen cars of the third section pulled into town. Nine of these were flats cars with ten seat wagons followed by ten Pullman cars full of show girls, performers, and administrative staff.

After all this effort the circus did good business in Hattiesburg before moving on to Meridian, Mississippi on Thursday, November 11. We came into town on the SOU line. In the hometown of the singing railroad man Jimmy Rogers we only did fair business. Next we went on Selma, Alabama on the 12th and then Montgomery on the 13th. Here we showed to a ¾ house in the afternoon and a full house that night. The weather was in the seventies during these days and a bit cool in the morning hours.

Sunday November 14, we had a day off while we moved into Columbus, Georgia, the home of Ft. Benning. As this was a short run of 95 miles on the C&G line we had a pleasant afternoon to enjoy the sites of the city. I met a college friend of mine who was based in the Army there and we rented a hotel room for the night. After a movie we shared pizza and beer with Alfred Burton and Dieter from the Fredonias. The next morning I was back to work. It was a rainy day and we did not do good business. While I was on my ticket box working another college friend of mine, John Mooneyham of Missouri, found me and we had a grand visit until my train left town late that night.

On November 16 we jumped 99 miles south to Albany, Georgia. The show traveled south on the Central of Georgia line and the Atlantic Coast Line. Again we had rain and a slight drizzle all day, but we did fair business. At the beginning of the show the Mayor of

Albany, "Taxicab" Smith, was introduced by Count Nicholas as the Mayor rode an elephant around the track to the delight of the locals.

The rain continued as we jumped south to Valdosta, Georgia and then on to Waycross and Brunswick on the east coast of the state. Then after five days in the Peach Tree state we were back in Florida on Saturday, November 20. After a jump of 102 miles on the ACL, we were in the railroad yards of Jacksonville. Again the show was greeted by a wet, soggy lot and rain and drizzle all day as we were on the next two days in Gainesville and Ocala. College students in Gainesville turned out for the show.

Tuesday, November 20, we moved 86 miles to Auburndale, Florida on the SAL line. Tommy Reale and I were able to walk from our coach to the lot on a bright sunny Florida day. It was special after all the days of drizzle in Georgia. I had my camera with me and shot film of us walking down the road and later scenes of the back yard during the matinee.

Wednesday, November 24, we jumped on the SAL&FEC line into West Palm Beach.

A friend of Merle Evans brought his white Cadillac over from Sarasota and Merle and wife Nena took Edna Antes and I out to supper between shows. Merle told us that he, Pat Valdo and Fred Bradna at one time produced private winter shows for wealthy residents of Palm Beach.

That night while the ring stock horses were walking down the highway to the train, a drunken driver drove into them. Some of the stock stampeded; one or two were killed and Doc Henderson and a crew were up all night searching for horses. Even local residents helped lead stock to the train. As a result of this accident our section did not leave for Ft. Lauderdale until the early morning hours. We were lucky it was only a 42 mile move.

Thursday, Thanksgiving day 1954, was my first holiday away from home and I was enjoying the beautiful Florida sunshine. That morning several trucks brought horses to the lot that had been rounded up in West Palm. Doc Henderson was busy and tired by midday as were the ring stock crew.

We enjoyed a wonderful turkey dinner with mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn bread stuffing and lots of cranberry sauce. That afternoon and between shows I was inspired to take more back yard movies. I also shot scenes of some of people out by the ticket wagons. I capture a great shot of Mr. Ed Kelly, who was the representative of the Ringling 49ers, traveling on the show.

He had once been assistant to former manager George Smith during the Robert Ringling era. Another shot was of bug man Mike Healy from Oneonta, New York, a long time circus concession man. My favorite shot, however, was of Ilonka Karoly warming up a gaited horse for the ménage number. Ilonka was a special friend of mine.

On November 26, 27, 28 we were in Miami for the last three days and six performances of the season. Everyone was tired and looking forward to the end. It was a short jump of 26 miles into Miami on the FEC-SAL line. The show did respectable business and I remember that Buddy Hackett, the comedian, came to one of the performances. He was hysterical when clown Ernie Burch strolled around the track in her tight fitting nurse's uniform with the inflated rear end and gigantic boobs.

Finally the last performance came, the singing of Auld Lang Syne and the last tear down before the home run to beautiful Sarasota. The season had lasted 229 days, and 431 performances with 360 of those under canvas. Everyone was tired and looking forward to being away from the daily grind. I was anxious to head home to upstate New York and I knew that my beloved circus horses would be pleased to be safely turned out to "doctor green" in Sarasota.

The Robbins Title 1881-1966

"Keeping It In The Family"

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

When examining the longevity of circus titles the Barnum and Ringling names are at the top of the list, followed by the Van Amburgh and John Robinson titles. However, the Robbins name is also a contender, having been used intermittently for over 87 years.

Frank A. Robbins, the patriarch of the family, first used his name in 1881 and continued the Frank A. Robbins Circus until 1915 with a handful of seasons on other shows. He died on October 13, 1920. In his will he left ownership of the title to his wife Matilda and son Milton A.

Floyd King wrote to Milton on a Rice Bros. Circus letterhead dated December 26, 1923, saying: "I am dropping you a line to know if you would be interested in leasing the Frank Robbins title for the coming season.

"We have a passenger moved circus and play mostly in Kentucky, West Virginia and occasionally in Pennsylvania. And I figure your title is well known down this way, although it has been off the road for seven or eight years. You know with a small show a fellow can not pay much royalty for a title as we do not give a street parade. If you could make a reasonable rate for the coming season, payable in a lump sum in advance, I would gamble on the chance whether or not these small towns would be profitable to us. And if the title was of value to us would be glad to pay you for other seasons its worth. We do not give a parade and play mostly in the Southern states.

"Mr. Mugivan has quoted a fair price on either the Howes Great London title, the Van Amburgh or Gollmar Bros. titles, but I thought I would write you."

Robbins responded, saying he was interested. King wrote Robbins back on January 7, 1924: "Your letter of the 28th received upon my return here yesterday. I was in Erie, Pennsylvania, placing printing order, also in Newport, Kentucky, with Donaldson.

"And when I got your letter I wired printers to hold up on order until they heard from me. And if we do business, I am afraid we would have to do it possibly this week as I don't want to be delayed in getting my printing.

"It is not so much the case as what the title is worth; but what we can afford to pay.

"As you know with a small show, everything is small, including the income. And in as much as we travel mostly in Ky., West Va., Virginia and in the south, what I paid you would aggregate a considerable amount for the short period we would be in your old territory. You know with a small show, even if you got the B & B title you have to stay in the sticks. When E. H. Jones picked up gratis the Cole Bros. title he always took particular pains to keep out of towns the Big

Cole Bros. Show had played. I figured your title would be of value, particularly in the feeder towns. I have never played New England or N. J. with my own show as I figured they were too wise for a small show. But I did think if I could get your title I might play a little of Maine or possibly N.J. on our way to Canada.

"With a 15 car show your title could go into any town in Penna., with a few exceptions, and get money. I would be lucky to get three weeks in the state with a small show. As I have found it, you have to keep away from those Interurban cars and in the jungles as far as possible.

"Mugivan and Bowers leased the Gollmar title to keep Fred Buchanan from getting it. By buying about \$6,000 worth of Gollmar paper and paying a very small royalty I could get that title but as I told Mr. Bowers I didn't figure the Gollmar title was any better than any other in the country we play.



A Frank A. Robbins poster c-1910. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.

"You know there are all kinds of fellows who will write and stall, but when it comes to laying down the money, and doing business, some weaken.

"All of the old paper and plates for the Robbins title have gone.

"For a 5 car show in passenger service, giving no parade; and for the few weeks we would be in the regular Robbins territory, my limit is \$25.00 per week which would run on the season \$750.00.

"We generally run 31 weeks, sometimes 32 and once 34 weeks. Would pay that regardless of the territory, whether we were in Miss., Okla., or Texas.



\$750 per season to us. It may be worth more. But I am willing to gamble and take a chance. And should I put out a 10 car show next year, would be willing to pay you more.

"Fred Buchanan originated the World Bros. title last year and he told me he made plenty that he wouldn't give a dime for any title outside of one of the big shows.

"When I got your letter I was all set on a good title, at a very small rental. The Nickel Plate title, (W. H. Harris) is for lease by Mrs. Chas. Wilson also the Howe's Great London, Van Amburg and Gollmar title, also Norris & Rowe.

The amount I mentioned is for the entire sea son, payable in advance and would send you \$100.00 deposit to apply for he last 4 weeks of the season. Wish you would wire me bynight letter collect. If acceptable would send you the deposit.

A Robbins poster c-1928. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.

"If we had a 10 car show, with a parade, you could gone almost anywhere, under such circumstances might pay what Downie paid Main when he had 15 cars, the first year, viz., \$50 per week.

After his wild west show closed in 1929 Buck Jones joined Robbins Bros. Circus.

With a show the size of mine, I have my doubts if the Robbins title would be worth

If not there will be no hard feelings and would try you some other time when we have a bigger show.

Famous Robbins 1935.

"Would have gladly given you the pit show. But candy stands, balloons and pit show we would have rented to a fellow who was over here last season.

"Suppose of course you have authority to act for Mrs. Frank A. Robbins."

But the deal fell through. King wrote Robbins on January 15, 1924: "Your favor of the 9th, at hand, and will state that I am sorry that we could not get together, but as I explained, and you will understand, the proposition I made you is the best a show of this size can stand.

"Maybe if this show of mine ever gets any larger I could meet your terms." King used the Harris Bros. title in 1924.

What King didn't know was that Milt Robbins was concurrently negotiating with Fred Buchanan to lease the Robbins Bros. title for his 30-car show. This lease continued through 1931

In 1929 Buchanan failed to send any money to Robbins. On April 3 1930 Mrs. F. A. Robbins received this telegram from Buchanan: "Your letter was referred to me today. Mr. Morse who has handled this matter seriously sick all winter thus no attention. Suggest that I send you check \$750 to cover last

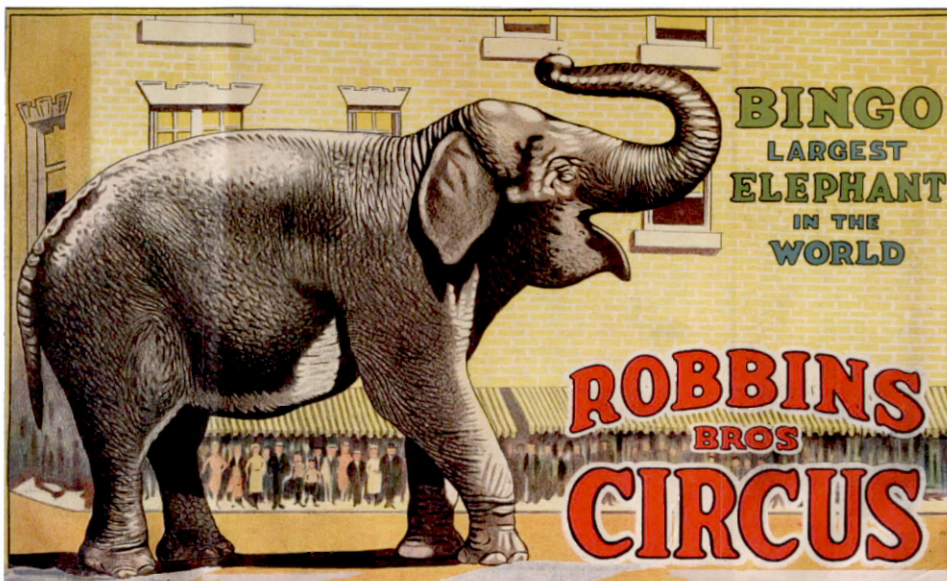


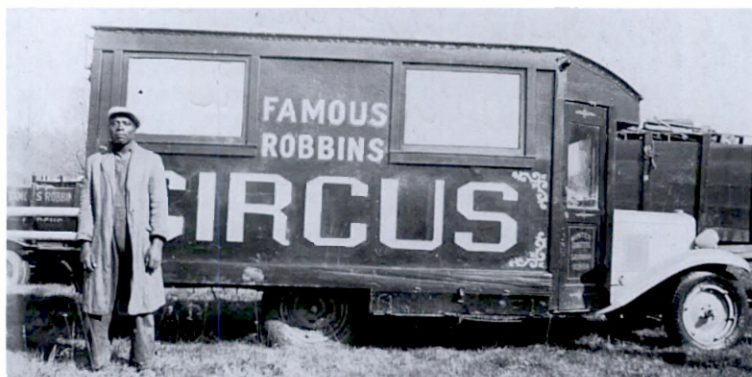
year. If this is satisfactory wire me today and will mail check. Sorry of the delay, but I have been away most of the winter." Mrs. Robbins answered on April 19: "Your telegram received. Very satisfactory. "Please send check. Greatly needed."

However Buchanan welshed on his promise to pay on the 1929 season. He wrote Mrs. Robbins on April

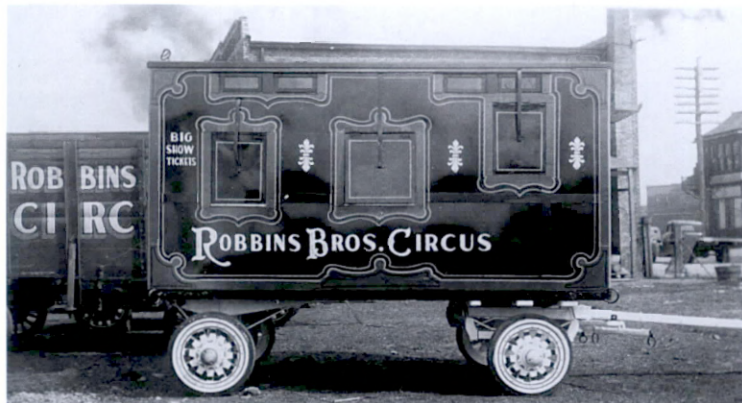
27 saying: "Enclosed find check for two hundred fifty dollars. I will make these payments two fifty each month during the season. This will absorb the amount due you and which was neglected by Mr. Morse."

Mrs. Robbins answered on May





James Heron's Famous Robbins in 1935. Pfening Archives.



Adkins and Terrell's 1938 Robbins Bros. Circus. Pfening Archives.



Big Bob Stevens 1949 Robbins Bros. Circus. Pfening Archives.



Jack Smith's 1965 Robbins Bros. Circus. Pfening Archives.

1, 1930. "Your favor of the 27th enclosed your check to my order for \$250 was duly received, and I thank you for it.

"It is almost needless to tell you that I was greatly disappointed at your failure to send me check for \$750 to cover last year charge for the use of my late husband's name for your circus. as promised in your telegram of the 3rd.

"In my telegram I told you that I was greatly in need of the money you owe me, and I would like to impress this fact upon you.

"You will be doing me a great favor if you promptly made good your promised payment and I trust you will do this."

It is doubtful that Mrs. Robbins received any money in 1931 as the show closed early and went to the William P. Hall farm in Lancaster, Missouri.

Sam B. Dill, a former American Circus Corporation manager, was the principal owner of the United Circus Corporation dba Gentry Bros. Circus in 1930. Dill was looking for a new title for the 1931 season and contacted Milt Robbins.

On March 27, 1931 on a Gentry Bros. letterhead Dill legal adjuster Kokomo Anders wrote to Robbins: "I have been talking to Mr. Dill about the Robbins Bros. title and he had me wire your Mother. She answered back that you had charge of the title and I am in receipt of your wire today.

"I have again taken the matter up with Dill and he will give you \$500 per year for the use of the Robbins Bros. title for one year with the privilege of five years. Of course he would want to stipulate in the contract you would not sell or use Famous Robbins title as long as he was leasing the title.

"Now let me know about this right away as he is dealing with another man for a title, but I think the Robbins title would be better for him than the other one he is considering. This is a nice equipped show and I am sure Dill would make a place for you if you wanted to come over here.

"Now if the above is satisfactory to you and the other owners let me hear from you, by wire at my expense and you have an attorney draw up the lease and send it out here for signatures."

Robbins provided a lease dated March 31, 1931 between Milton A. Robbins of Petersburg, Illinois, Matilda Robbins of Jersey City, New Jersey, and the United Circus Corporation and Sam B. Dill of West Baden, Indiana in which they leased Dill the use of the name "Robbins" in any form other than Frank A. Robbins. The lease was for the 1931 season only. Two hundred fifty was due at time of delivery of the lease with the remainder to be paid at fifty dollars per month, beginning the first day of June 1931 until the total consideration of \$500 has been paid.

Dill used the Robbins name only in 1931 and in 1932 he changed the name to Sam B. Dill's Circus.

It is not known how the conflict with Buchanan's use of the title affected the lease with Dill.

James Heron used the Famous Robbins title from 1934 to 1937. Like Gopher Davenport today, Heron often changed titles in a given year, using Cody Wild West, Bond Bros.,

World Bros., even Yankee Robbins.

Following a very successful 1937 tour of Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus, owners Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell decided to tour a second, smaller circus in 1938. Floyd King suggested the Robbins Bros. title. Adkins initially wanted call the new show the John Robinson Circus, but John Ringling North wouldn't lease the name.

On February 12, 1938 Jess Adkins wrote to Milt Robbins: "Your favor received inclosing contract for title arrangement and we have signed this agreement and are returning all copies to you herewith, Will you please sign these copies, also have your mother sign them and, return one copy to us for our files at your early convenience. We are attaching herewith One Hundred Dollars as first two month's rental as per your request. This agreement seems to cover the situation pretty well with the exception of the fact that you and, your Mother should state that you have the exclusive right to lease the title of ROBBINS BROS. CIRCUS and that you will do all in your power to protect us from others trying to claim and use the same title. We wish you would acknowledge receipt of the enclosed remittance, and at the same time write us a letter, signed by yourself and your mother, to the above effect. The word season was also left a little vague as to just what it did mean, so I have taken the liberty of adding a paragraph to the bottom of the contract explaining what the word 'season' is intended to mean as used in the contract, so will ask that you and your mother sign this extra paragraph at the same time as you sign the contract proper.

"Now, Milt, regarding the side show. I believe we will get a lot of money with this show. We are going to give it a big show advertising the same as we have done with Cole Bros., so I am going to give you five percent of the [sideshow] front door and the back end. We to have fifty percent of the take on the mitt joint. This is the same arrangement we used to have when we were operating this size show and I know the Saturday night envelope of some of the old side show managers like McFarland and Arthur Hoffman used to be pretty fat, so I know on this basis you will make yourself a lot of money. But when we originally talked with you regarding the title I said we would make some satisfactory arrangement regarding the side show, so I want the arrangement to be just as we

originally talked of; hence the above offer to you. Now, wire me immediately upon receipt of this letter if above is O.K. and I will send contract covering."

The contract between Milt and Matilda Robbins and Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell stated that \$50 per week would be paid for use of the title.

The Cole show closed in midseason in 1938 and Clyde Beatty and the Cole big top and seating were sent to enlarge the Robbins show playing the south using the Famous Robbins title.

In August 1938 Milt Robbins contacted Arthur B. McCall, a patent and copyright attorney in Springfield, Illinois about a new copyright registration for the protection of "Robbins Circus." On September 1, McCall sent the copyright application blank to Robbins to sign as owner of the title.

In 1940 Floyd King operated a merchants street show using the Robbins Bros. title.

On December 15, 1944 C. C. Smith, writing on a Bailey Bros. Circus letterhead, wrote Milt Robbins: "What do you have in mind for the coming season? Thought you might be interested in going out with the Bailey Bros. Circus. No one has been engaged for the side show and in the event you still have your pit show, perhaps you could book that also. I talked to Mr. Stevens about changing titles coming season, and recommended using your title, that is if we could arrange this.

"As soon as you received this letter, be sure to write me at once and let me know just how you feel about the above proposition." Apparently nothing came of this.

However Stevens and Robbins did get together to use the Robbins title in 1949.

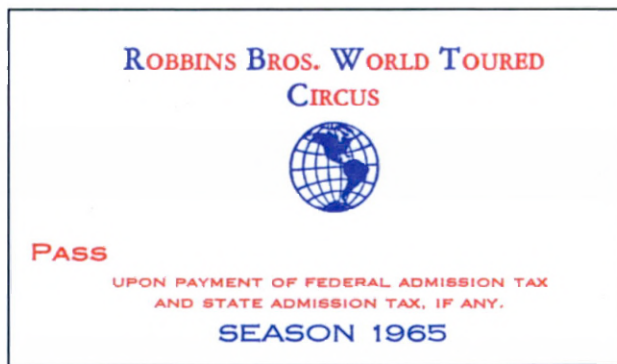
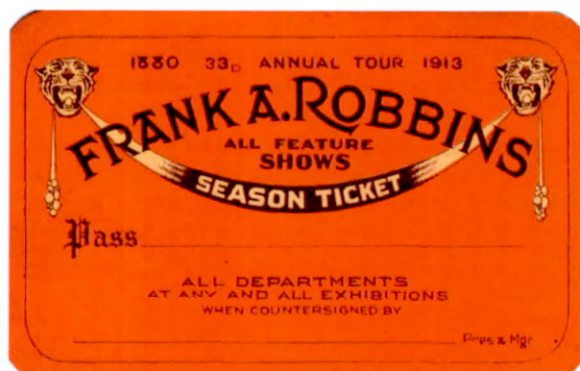
Smith wrote Robbins on February 25, 1949: "I have signed contracts for your signature. I have started to letter rolling stock already.

"I would appreciate having all the press material you have for the title, and I would like to get the cut used in making up the letterhead and envelopes.

"I'll have a very nice show, and your title will be in better shape at the closing of the present season than before."

The final use of the Robbins title was in 1965 and 1966 when Jack Smith toured the title on trucks.

ROBBINS SEASON PASSES



BILL KASISKA'S LETTERHEADS

W. W. COLE'S REAL RACING HIPPODROME,
MENAGERIE, CIRCUS, &c.

W. W. COLE, Proprietor and Manager.

T. L. FITCH, Assistant Manager.


R. W. FRYER, Equestrian Manager.

FRED LEVENS, Treasurer.

W. R. HAYDEN, General Agent.

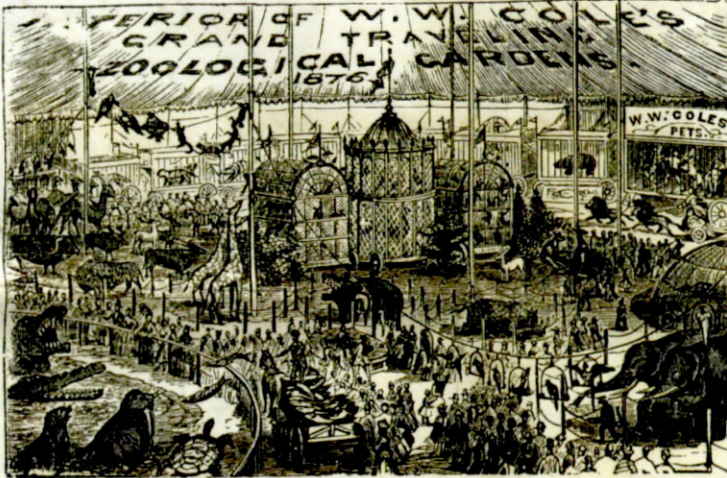
E. A. ALEXANDER, General Advertiser.

C. SIVALLS, Contracting Agent.



Brockville July 23 1876.

Friend Davis, Yours to Kingston recd. Glad to hear



Chillicothe Ohio

Sep 9 1876

Friend Davis

Your telegram received on my return to the show at Jackson also your answer at this point. Well I cannot reach the October steamer so probably

The W. W. Cole Circus used at least two styles of letterheads in 1876. That season Cole expanded the performance to two rings and added a hippodrome, a popular attraction in the 1870s. A railroad show with a terrific parade, it started the year in its usual territory of Iowa and Illinois until the end of June when it went into Canada for about a month. Stands followed in New York State, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee into October. Cole then bought a steamboat and played the lower Mississippi River and its tributaries into December. A true wunderkind, he was only twenty-nine years old, and in his sixth year as a show owner.

A Brief Overview of the Circus & Allied Arts Collection at Milner Library, Illinois State University

By Maureen Brunsdale and Steve Gossard

One of the largest collections within Milner Library's Special Collections & Rare Book Room is the Circus and Allied Arts Collection. Though its main focus is circus materials, it also includes related arts such as carnivals, carousels, magic, Wild West shows, and vaudeville. The collection contains a wealth of primary and secondary source materials. Begun in 1955 by then-library director Eleanor Welch, this collection's original purpose was to document the important relationship that existed between the Bloomington-Normal community and circus performance.

Bloomington's field show history began in 1871 when a local boy named Fred Miltmore ran away with the circus. He returned a few years later and began recruiting other local men for his trapeze act, the Flying Fishers. In time, Bloomington became a popular winter training location for some of the finest aerialists in the country, employing deserted railroad structures, ice houses, barns and eventually the YMCA gymnasium as indoor practice sites. For over a century Bloomington's aerial troupes performed in circuses around the world. The Flying Fishers, Flying La Vans, Flying Wards and The Flying Concellos were just a few of the acts. The YMCA in Bloomington played an active role in training circus professionals from 1900 until World War II. During this period, Clifford Horton, Illinois State University's Physical Education Director, brought students in to take part in the annual YMCA Circus. Horton's participation in the YMCA Circus led to the establishment of the Gamma Phi Circus at Illinois State. The Gamma Phi Circus is still today an outstanding feature of Illinois State University, and is the oldest collegiate circus in America.

Part of the Milner circus book collection with Frosty Little's costume at right.



Instrumental to the growth of this collection has been the acquisition of outstanding private collections of enthusiasts and past performers. Recognizing the unique relationship between the circus and the Bloomington and Normal communities, Welch began to solicit local fans and professionals to donate their collections to Milner Library. Most notably, she obtained the collections of Clyde and Emily Noble, Arnold Riegger, and Harold Ramage.

Clyde Noble and wife Emily Vecchi both worked with the Ringling Brothers Circus between 1900 and World War I. Clyde was a catcher with a trapeze act called the Flying



Walter Scholl, at right, with Lalo Codona on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1934. Pfening Archives.

Fishers and Emily--known as "La Petite Emilie"--was the star of the Vecchi bicycle troupe. Their collection consists of scrapbooks, diaries and photographs.

Arnold Riegger worked as a trapeze artist and wire walker before becoming a professional photographer and projectionist in the community's local theaters. Between 1915 and 1950 he took hundreds of photographs of virtually all phases of circus life and work. Recently, Milner Library purchased his negative collection.

While Harold Ramage was not a circus man by profes-



Animal Circus with Ringling Brothers in 1906; to route cards; circus and performers' letterheads; to broadsides and circus posters dating from the 18th and early 19th centuries to the 1950s; to pamphlets; programs; photographs; route books; realia and ephemeral materials. The addition of this collection made Illinois State University's Circus & Allied Arts Collection truly international.

A page from a scrap book.

Under Director Joe Kraus' leadership, the library's collection grew significantly in scope again when it obtained the collection of Jo van Doveren, and its size more than doubled with the addition of Sverre Braathen's collection.

The Dutch collector, Jo van Doveren began his career as a bill poster, and eventually worked up to the position of publicist and general show manager. His collection primarily consisted of western European books which focused on the role circus and allied arts played in society throughout history. Slightly more than twenty-two hundred books were added to Milner Special Collections with the purchase of this collection. Of particular note is the work, *Practica et Arte di Cavalleria*. Written in 1681 by

Christopher Lieb, a court equerry, the book details how to break and train royal cavalry horses, and the fitting of their

sion, he did interact with many of the performers--particularly aerialists. His career as president of the Kaiser Van Leer hardware and wholesale business enabled him to assist trapeze artists and other aerialists in obtaining their rigging. Ramage had a keen interest in the circus arts and built strong relationships with many of the local professionals, a fact that is well illustrated in his collection of 8mm films. These films are not only historically important for studying trapeze training and performance, but also for bringing to life the performers' community while at home. In addition, the Ramage collection includes hundreds of photographs and correspondence.

Sverre Braathen, on right, with James A. Haley, President of Ringling-Barnum, in 1946.

Director Welch's dedication to the cultural phenomenon of circus was carried forward and grew under the leadership of directors Robert Hertel, Joe Kraus, Fred Peterson, and Dean Cheryl Elzy. In the early 1960's, Robert Hertel spent one-fifth of the library's collection development budget to purchase the significant Walter Scholl collection. Scholl began collecting circus-related materials in August, 1920 and continued to do so for the rest of his life. He built three collections, two of which he disposed of during his lifetime. The first, in 1938, was in part sold to fellow Chicago collector Burt Wilson.

Illinois State has Scholl's second collection. Consisting of approximately 24,000 items, it ranges from books; to manuscripts including a contract combining the Carl Hagenback Wild





A Braathen slide taken on Cole Bros. Circus in the 1940s.

bits and bridles. The book was written while Lieb was in service to the German prince-electors Christian II of Saxony and his brother Johan Georg I.

It contains sixty-four detailed engravings of subjects ranging from a view of the inside of a horse's mouth to the patterns involved in disciplined equestrian exercises. Such exercises began with simple line formations and proceed to intricate patterns often seen in northern European court festivals. It is estimated that as few as fifty copies of this publication were printed. Only three are known to exist in public collections today.

Without question, materials from Sverre Braathen's collection (known to his friends as "Bex") are most often requested and used by Milner Library's Special Collections patrons. An attorney by trade and coronet player by avocation, Braathen seriously began collecting circus materials in the late 1920s. By the time of his death in 1974, he had amassed what he called "the world's largest and best privately-held circus collection in the world." He was exaggerating, but his holdings were massive. His secondary sources included a full run of Ringling Bros. and Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey programs and route books up to 1950, hundreds of couriers and heralds, and over 1500 posters. His archive of Ringling Bros. materials is one of the highlights of his collection. It includes hundreds of letters to and from the Ringlings and their circus dating from the 1890s to the 1920s as well as daily income and

expense ledgers from both the Ringling and Barnum shows from 1889 to 1922. These business records were abandoned by the circus when it left its Baraboo, Wisconsin winter quarters in 1918. Braathen and a handful of others acquired material from the Ringling office building from the man who bought the property from the Ringlings.

He had more than 13,000 photographs, slides, and negatives—a small fraction of which were reproduced in Taschen's *Circus, 1870-1950*, published in 2008. The book revealed Braathen's previously unknown talent as a photographer. A dedicated musician, he also had a large holding of sheet music of songs played during circus performances. The incredible correspondence files he kept cannot be overlooked, and they will be referenced later in this article.

Director Fred Peterson and Dean Cheryl Elzy oversaw the inclusion of the materials from the collections of Rink Wright, Dennis Watson, Jack Atkinson, Frank Ball, Harold Barnes, Al Dobritch, Charles H. Tinney, George Hartzel and others. Taken together, these collections have served to complement what already existed as one of the largest and most comprehensive public circus research collections in the United States. The early years of American circus, from the 1850s onward, are represented in the complete run of the *New York Clipper* (on microfilm), and *Billboard* magazines (available in hard copy).

While the Braathen, Scholl, and Ramage collections provided a detailed history of American circus up through the 1950s, the collections of Atkinson, Ball and Watson—primarily photos, books, programs and route books—extend the scope of the collection to the present. With Milner Library's policy of maintaining contemporary circus and circus-related periodical subscriptions it is assured that Milner Library's Circus & Allied Arts collection continues to be a complete and comprehensive modern resource.

An overview of the Milner circus collection would be incomplete without particular attention to the Rink Wright, Al Dobritch and Frank Ball collections. Rink Wright was a stationary bar performer before becoming a booking agent in Omaha. Over the years he contracted hundreds of acts

for the Omaha Shrine Circus. His collection of hundreds of photographs and correspondence illustrates the wide variety of performances that showed in this venue during the 1950s and 1960s.

A collection of magazines with circus-related covers.

Bulgarian-born Alexander Alexandroff Dobritch's roots were in circus and the circus remained his career to the end of his life. After immigrating to America he became well-known as a circus producer, agent/pro-



This Agreement made this 4th day of Dec 1906 by and between Ringling Bros of Baraboo Wis parties of the first part and John H Havlin and Frank R Tate of Cincinnati and StLouis parties of the 2nd part.

Whereas the parties of the first part are the owners of the Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros Shows and whereas the second parties have agreed to acquire the Carl Hagenbeck greater Shows from the Carl Hagenbeck Circus and Show Co and whereas it is the mutual desire of both parties hereto to combine said shows it is hereby mutually agreed by and between said parties that they will on or before the 15th day of Dec.1906 organize a Corporation with a Capital Stock of at least One Million Dollars to take over purchase and own said shows. Said parties of the first part hereby agree that they will sell and convey ~~thex~~ to said new Corporation the Forepaugh & Sells Bros Shows for Seventy percent of the Capital Stock of the new Corporation and said second parties hereby agree to convey and sell to said New Corporation the Carl Hagenbeck greater Shows for thirty percent of the stock of the New Corporation. Said parties of the first and second part agree to deliver their respective shows at the Winter Quarter of the Forepaugh-Sells Shows at Columbus O free and clear of any incumbrance In witness whereof the parties hereto have attached their signatures in quadruplicate this 4th day of Dec.1906.

*Alf. J. Ringling
Geo. Ringling
Otto Ringling
W. Ringling
Chas Ringling
John H. Havlin
Frank R. Tate*

moter and circus owner. His collection includes roughly 2000 files of correspondence with various acts as well as over 850 files of correspondence with agents. The Dobritch International Circus provided talent to Shrine Circuses across much of the United States. Dobritch's well-organized collection also includes more than 500 photographs of various performers and acts, 50 folders of employment contracts, insurance contracts, and financial statements for Shrine Circus shows dating from the mid-1950's to the early 1960's.

The Frank Ball collection is a visual archive. Taken together with the Braathen collection of photographs and slides, it provides a continuous illustration of all phases of circus life from the 1930s through the 1980s. Ball's collection includes more than 11,000 photographs and 7,000 color slides.

Altogether, the Circus and Allied Arts collection is organized broadly by item type. Book holdings number well over eight thousand, and all the major national and international circus periodicals are available. Ephemeral items such as costumes, photographs, posters, prints, slides, and advertising pieces number close to a half-million; while

dozens of films, hundreds of music scores and recordings, route books, programs, and ledgers work to balance the collection with details not found elsewhere.

Equally fascinating are the letters left to us by Sverre Braathen. His personal correspondence with scores of circus professionals measures roughly twenty-six cubic feet and adds character to the lives of his circus associates (for example, letters to Bex and wife Faye from Helen Wallenda and Alex Neuberger provide graphic detail from two different vantage points of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey show during the Hartford fire of 1944).

One of the treasures of the Illinois State collection is this contract between the Ringlings and the owners of the American version of the Carl Hagenbeck Wild Animal Circus. Plan to combine Forepaugh-Sells with Hagenbeck fell through when Ringlings could not be assured the use of the Hagenbeck title.

Access to these materials is growing. Plans are underway to hire a full-time cataloger whose job it will be to catalog the items listed above. Once cataloged locally, the records for those items will be uploaded into OCLC's WorldCat so that researchers from around the world will know what is available. Milner Library's new Digitization Center will work to provide digital access to the ephemeral items whose metadata will be similarly captured and uploaded. These responsibilities take time, energy, and coordination of resources. With a full-time librarian, a circus curator, and two dedicated staff members every effort will be made to realize these goals.

At the same time, Milner Library's Special Collections unit works tirelessly to promote its unique and wonderful collections. In the past two years Milner Library's Special Collections has sponsored many events to foster enthusiasm and support within this community and beyond. A book launch was held on the sixth floor of Milner Library for editor Noel Daniel when her book *Circus, 1870-1950* was published. After the legendary Tony Steele donated his amazing scrapbook, the Special Collections Department hosted a party for him as a way of saying "thank you." And, Special Collections hosts a kick-off event before Gamma Phi Circus's annual home show. Many performers, their families and fans from the community and beyond attend to celebrate eighty-plus years of circus on campus.

It is with pride that Special Collections will be opening its doors to the Circus Historical Society next summer. Taken together, the materials housed at Milner Library's Special Collections & Rare Book Room give the researcher, scholar, and fan a glimpse into the financing, costuming, marketing, and staging required for a circus to maintain its livelihood. The tremendous cultural impact circus had on the United States is difficult to articulate, but anyone who would like to try is always welcome. Call 309-438-2871 for an appointment.

Automobiles and Two Depressions Caused the Decline of the Circus

By Sverre O. Braathen

While going through some records recently, the editors discovered the following manuscript in the files. For reasons obscure since the Nixon administration, this piece was never published. Sverre O. Braathen, a long-time member of the Circus Historical Society, submitted this autobiographical article in February 1973, about a year and a half before his death on 19 July 1974. While many readers will disagree with his conclusions on the decline of the circus, his analysis is nevertheless thought provoking.

Unless one lived in a small town during the golden age of the circus he has no conception of the impact of the circus on the people in this country. I was raised and educated in Mayville, North Dakota, a town at that time of 1000 people and 2000 at the present day. In that little town we had an opera house that seated about 300 people. In the winter Uncle Tom's Cabin, Ten Nights in a Bar Room, minstrel and medicine shows would come to the opera house. Some of them had brass bands. Medicine shows stayed a week and sold snake oil that was a cure for all ailments.

The State Normal School was on a Lyceum circuit and each fall we heard the Minneapolis Philharmonic Orchestra which was composed of twelve musicians from the symphony orchestra. One year we heard the Smith-Springs-Holmes Concert Company. Guy E. Holmes, who lived in Baraboo, Wisconsin, was a very good composer of band music, and in his later years taught at the Vandercook School of Music in Chicago. His brother Will played the piccolo and flute with circus bands. One year Bohumir Kryl, one of the greatest cornet soloists of that time, and his two very talented daughters, Marie and Josephine, played a concert. One of the girls was a pianist and had played with the leading symphony orchestras in this country. The other was a violinist who had also been featured with the leading symphony orchestras. Kryl played two major solos, the first of which was the Grand Russian Fantasy by Jules Levy, an outstanding cornet soloist of his time. The second solo was J. B. Arban's arrangement of Carnival of Venice, a wonderful solo and the best of the arrangements of that number.

In the summer we got a broken down merry-go-round for a week and a one-car carnival. There were also tent shows that would generally play the same plays you would see at the opera house during the winter. Then there was the annual Chautauqua that ran about five days.

Braathen on Ringling-Barnum in 1934.

Every summer the merchants and professional men along the two block main street would raise a sufficient sum of money to hire a semi-pro baseball team. The season

always ended on July 4th because at that time the farmers began harvesting their crops. Not only did we see games with all the neighboring towns, but the Boston Bloomers, an all-girls baseball team, would also appear. The All Nations Baseball team, so named because it included players of many races and nationalities, also appeared in Mayville. Every year they would lose the first game they played in every town. Then they would bet a large sum of money that they could beat the local team with only three men. They could get away with this seemingly absurd wager because John Donaldson, their star pitcher, would strike out most of the opposing team. Donaldson was a great pitcher who couldn't play in the major leagues because he was black. New York Giants manager John McGraw, one of the best baseball minds of the era, said that Donaldson was the finest pitcher in the game.

I saw my first circus at Grand Forks, North Dakota, on July 7, 1904. My father rented a team of horses hitched to a surrey for the forty mile overland trip to see the Ringling Bros. Circus. In later years I saw Barnum and Bailey, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sells-Floto, Al. G. Barnes, Buffalo Bill's Wild



West and others in either Grand Forks or Fargo. It was possible to see them because the railroad ran excursion train to these cities on circus day.

Faye Braathen on Ringling-Barnum in 1934.

I saw my first circus in Mayville about 1907. Every morning we would go to the Great Northern Depot about 9:30 to see a three car passenger train come from the south and head north. One morning there was a fourth car attached to the train. It was brightly colored with the words Gollmar Bros. Greatest of American Shows, Advertising Car No. 1. After it was detached from the train on the back side of the depot at Main Street, a number of livery stable wagons with teams of horses made their appearance. A can of paste, long handled brushes, rolls of paper and two men drove away to the country to post the bills. Other men took a roll of paper and long ticks and walked along both sides of Main Street and hung the lithos and date sheets in all the store windows. In those days the merchants let them fill their windows with posters and date sheets. At the intersection of the two blocks of Main Street a huge billboard was erected and covered in lithographs. It fronted 50 or 60 feet on Main Street and about 150 feet along a side street.

The night before the circus arrived about two hundred men and boys sat on the depot platform all night waiting for the circus train to arrive. It was a 26 car train and unloaded on Main Street at the depot. The haul to the lot was only

three blocks. The performers, musicians and others could step off the coaches and walk only a block to the lot. Almost every year the parade moved along the three blocks of Main Street, two blocks of stores and one of railroad tracks. It would make a U-turn and come back on Main Street. In those days Mayville was jammed with horses and buggies as well as people for circus day. This was also true in Grand Forks and Fargo for the larger circuses.

The Braathen circus room in 1936. Pfening Archives.

Until the automobile made its appearance about 1912, the people in all villages in this country as well as cities were fenced in, you might say. Once people acquired a car they could take drives out into the country and to the lakes in Minnesota. When more and more people acquired cars they began to lose interest in the circus because there were too many other places to go for recreation. Then came golf courses. The golden age of the circus had come of age by the end of World War I and began to decline.

On October 29, 1929 the Coolidge prosperity suddenly collapsed as the stock market crashed. By the end of 1929 fifteen billion dollars in equity had vanished into thin air. Until Roosevelt's New Deal took effect, millions of people in this country had not even had so much as a thin dime in their hands for over two years. Many cities were broke and could not feed their people. When people could not buy bread, they could not buy circus tickets. Many circuses went broke and many titles were taken off the road, never to be used again, including Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson, Sells-Floto, Downie Bros., Seils-Sterling, Christy Bros. Walter L. Main and Al. G. Barnes. Anyone who did not live through 1929 and the early 1930s has no idea what a horrible thing the Depression was.

Fred D. Pfening III came to the conclusion (in the September-October 1971 *Bandwagon*) that the loss of frontier territory caused the decline of the circus. Most certainly New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, New Haven, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Worcester, Springfield, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, Buffalo, Akron, Youngstown, and many other cities were not frontier towns, and they were among the best circus cities in the country. Cities that were good circus towns in 1890 were just as good circus towns in 1956, the last year the Ringling show traveled as a railroad tent show. If any circus man ever said there were no more \$10,000 days in Portland and Seattle or \$200,000 seasons in California, he did not know what he was talking about. Until the shows merged in 1919, Barnum and Bailey, and Ringling Bros. were the only circuses having income of more than \$200,000 in California, and each did it only once. Even accounting for inflation, \$10,000 days in the Northwest, and \$200,000 in

California have become more commonplace.

Stuart Thayer came to the conclusion (in the July-August 1972 *Bandwagon*) that high freight rates killed the railroad circus. The facts do not bear this out. All the rail shows were off the road except Ringling-Barnum, Dailey Bros. and Clyde Beatty when the high freight rates came in after World War II.

In the 1920s and 1930s and in the early 1940s in the Madison area, we could visit

such shows as Bud Anderson, Seils-Sterling, Bailey Bros., James M. Cole, Hagen Bros., Curtis-Gregg, Tom Mix, Downie Bros., Lewis Bros., Russell Bros., Dailey Bros., Arthur Bros. and many other circuses. We would have at least forty circus days every summer. Then came a great number of fairs with excellent circus acts. These were followed by the fall festivals in little



villages that often booked wonderful circus performers. There would be no circuses on the road any more other than Ringling-Barnum but for the sale of UPC (underprivileged children) tickets (via telemarketing).

Recently, Beatty-Cole played the fair grounds in Madison on the same day the New York Philharmonic Orchestra played the Dane County Coliseum, also at the fair grounds. The Philharmonic had a sell out of over 10,000 people. Beatty had two poor houses. Anyone driving from Illinois on the Interstate Highway system will notice that the cars are bumper to bumper going to the lakes in northern Wisconsin on week ends. That is why we do not see a large number of circuses every summer or have around forty or fifty days of shows.

For several reasons it is out of the question to organize and operate a railroad tent show in this country at the present day. With very few passenger trains in operation it would be impossible to move advertising cars around the country. Thousands of miles of railroad track have been abandoned. Also, more and more depots are being abandoned. With very few exceptions it has become impossible to service the sleeping cars with water and sanitation. The Ringling shows at the present day obtain water from cities, and the sanitation is taken care of by local people who have the necessary facilities.

Cities have grown so much in this country that with few exceptions it is impossible to find lots big enough for railroad circuses other than fairground lots. If lots were obtainable in some cities it is doubtful circuses would be permitted to haul their trucks and equipment over the streets from the runs to the circus lots and back.

It is quite apparent that the golden age of the circus and the railroad tent show is a thing of the past, and highly improbable that the future will see these amusement institutions that brought to millions of people in this country their richest holiday.



The 1938 Col. Tim McCoy Real Wild West Show was financed by \$100,000 from McCoy, who owned 51% of the company stock. The remaining 49% was rounded up by Benjamin Ladd Cook, a Providence, Rhode Island financier.

The show was built from scratch. Thirty-nine wagons were constructed by the Springfield Wagon and Trailer Company in Springfield, Missouri. The canvas came from Baker-Lockwood of Kansas City. Twelve flat cars and eight stocks came from the Warren Tank Car Company of Warren, Pennsylvania. Sleepers, a private car and an advance car came from various railroads.

The sleepers were #40, Cheyenne, a Pullman parlor car with two staterooms, one bedroom, a living, dining, kitchen and three shower baths; #41, Arapaho, wooden coach with two bedrooms, living, dining, kitchen, shower bath and double bunks; #42 Navajo, wooden coach, three staterooms and double bunks; #43, Comanche, wooden coach with double bunks; #44, Osage, half pie car, half double bunks; #45, Lakota, wooden coach, half double bunks, half triple high bunks; #46, Blackfoot, wooden coach, one quarter restaurant, rest three high bunks; #47, Pawnee, wooden coach, two and three high bunks; #48, Apache, wooden coach with three high bunks; #49, Steel Pullman, advance car with boiler

room, two staterooms, and storage space.

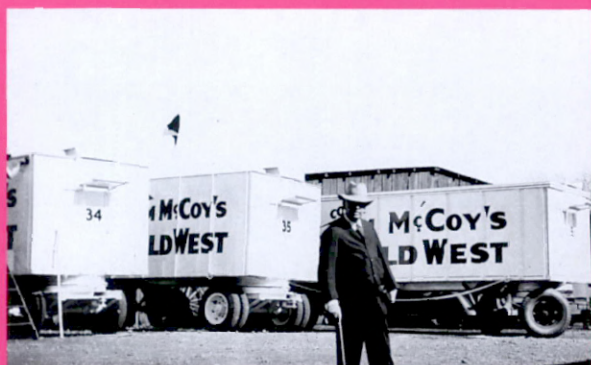
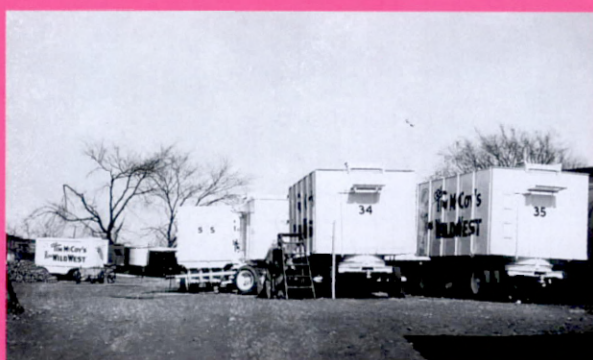
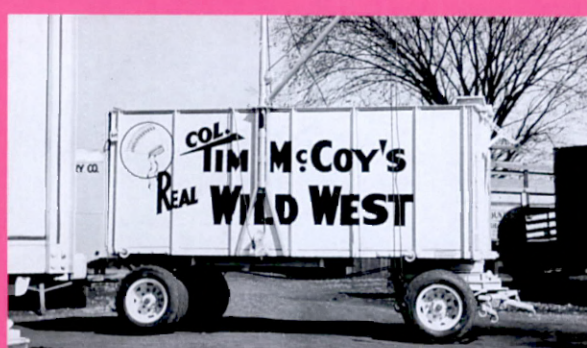
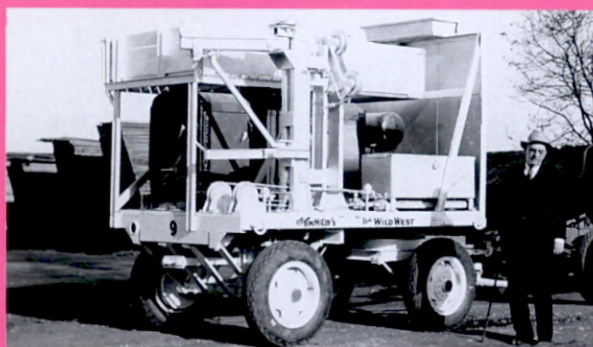
The McCoy show opened in Chicago at the International Amphitheatre on April 14 through the 23rd. It had opposition from Cole Bros. and Hagenbeck-Wallace in the Windy City.

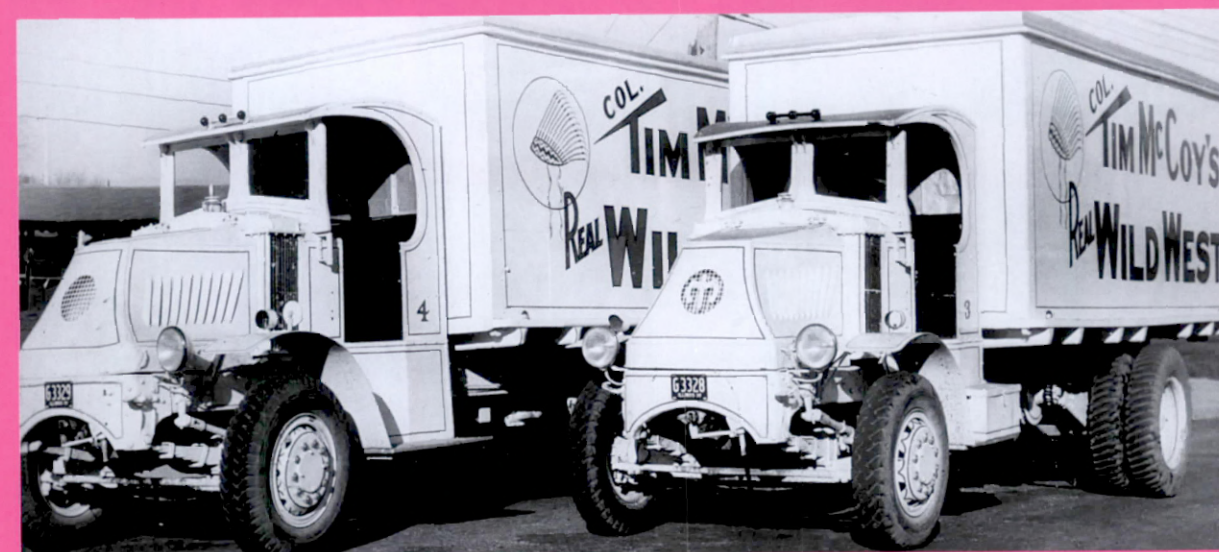
The under canvas tour began in Columbus, Ohio on April 25. Dayton, Cincinnati, Parkersburg and Clarksburg, West Virginia followed. It played Washington, D.C. May 2-4, after which it closed.

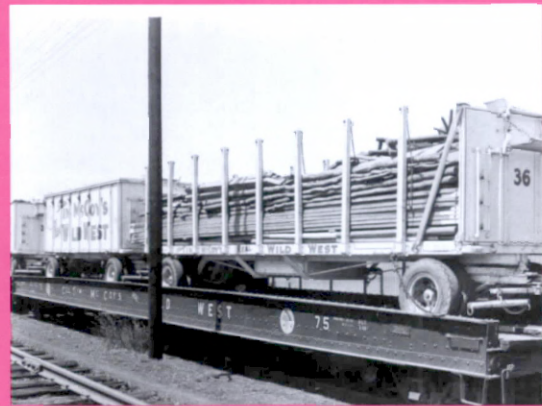
The wagons were: #8, stake driver; #9, stake driver; #11, cookhouse; #12, cookhouse; #14, cookhouse; #15, water wagon; #21, canvas; #22, canvas; #23, chairs; #24, chairs; #25, chairs; #26, chairs; #27, jacks and blues; #28, jacks and blues; #31, planks; #32, planks; #33, planks; #34, planks; #35, planks; #36, stringers; #37, stringers; #38, stringers; #41, light plant; #42, light plant; #43, light plant; #44, train light plant; #45, stake and chain; #46, scenery; #51, horse tent; #52, blacksmith; #53, pad room tent; #54, band supply and speaker wagon; #55, props; #56, wardrobe; #60, main ticket wagon; #61, side show canvas and banner line; #62, sideshow ticket wagon; and #63, concessions wagon. Additionally, the show carried four motorized vehicles: #1, Mack truck; #2, Mack truck; #3, Mack truck; #4, Chevrolet 1938 1½ ton truck, used on advance.



The never before published photos on this page were taken by Everett Esliinger, an employee of the Springfield Wagon and Trailer Company at the Springfield factory. They are from the E. Lee Steury collection.







Barnum and London in 1883

This review of the Barnum and London Circus's appearance in Woodstock, Ontario, Canada on 25 July 1883 makes a number of insightful and historically significant points. Far more than other reviews, it explicitly observed that the public gauged the quality of a circus's performance by the merit of its parade. It also made the startling revelation that Jumbo provided rides for patrons in the menagerie, a task he performed at the London Zoo before coming to America the previous year. This is the earliest reference of a circus providing elephant rides to customers.

During the 1880s the talking clown died. This account acknowledges his passing, but then sarcastically relates that disgruntled editors could no longer exact retribution for not getting enough passes by complaining in print that the clown jokes were as old as "when Noah was a boy."

It touches on other aspects of circus day, the train unloading, the hubbub in town, the ethnological exhibits, and the polite manner in which the entire enterprise was conducted. In all, the review is a well-written, perceptive record of a big day for Woodstock 126 years ago. Fred Pfening III

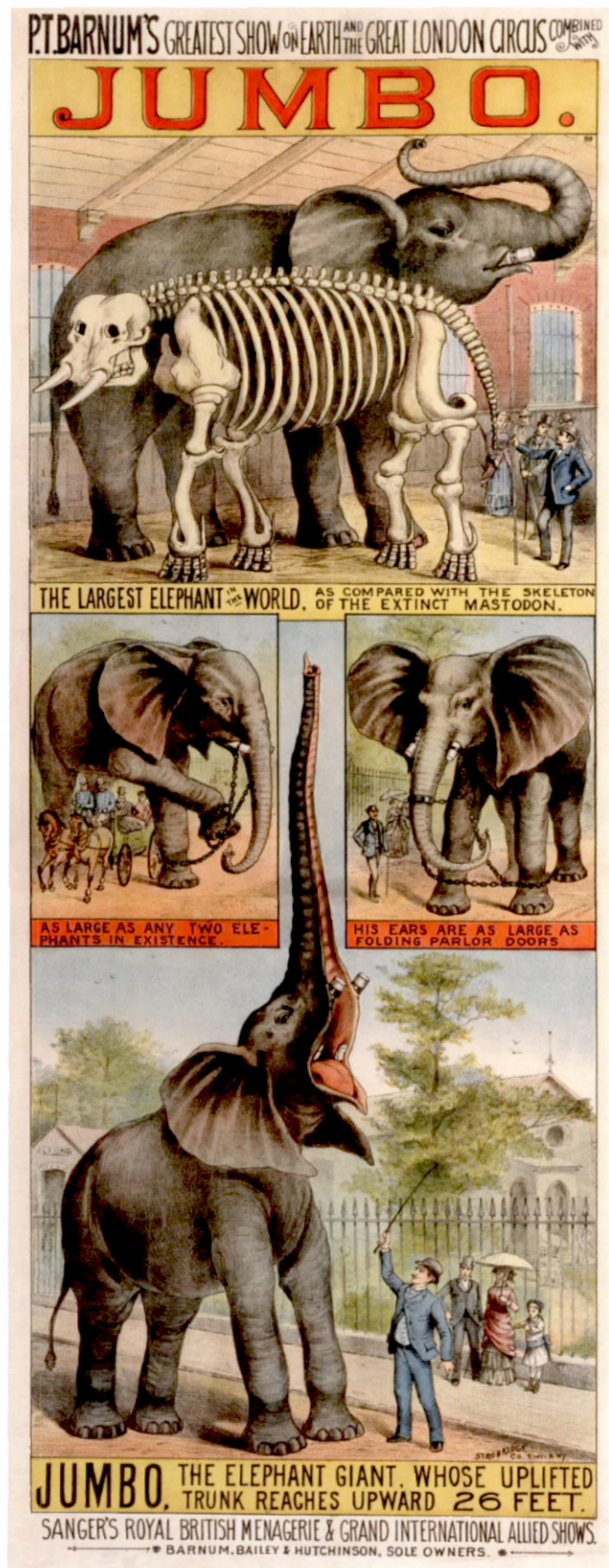
"Barnum and Jumbo," By a "Sentinel-Review" Special—Trained at Great Expense for the Occasion, *The Sentinel-Review*, Woodstock, Ontario, Canada, 27 July 1883, p. 1.

The people of this county and those from a distance who visited Woodstock on Wednesday were specially favored by the delightful weather which prevailed, both day and night, and that enabled them to enjoy at their leisure the immense all-day show of Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson's mammoth aggregation. At daylight in the morning hundreds of people were at the station to witness the unloading from the trains of the animals and carriages, many being especially attracted there under the expectation of getting a glimpse of the world-renowned Jumbo, whose name and reputation has for the time being overshadowed that of Barnum himself.

Superb Jumbo poster by Strobridge, 1882. Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.

At an hour when on ordinary week days the only sound heard is the opening of shutters in a half-hearted way by sleepy porters and clerks, the streets were being thronged by rural visitors in teams and on foot, and when the early morning trains from the east, west, north and south arrived they were packed with people who had come for a holiday and to see the sights. The rumbling of the heavy circus wagons as they passed up Dundas street on their way to the grounds awoke many who would have gladly slept on but who, when once aroused, were just as eager to be out sight-seeing as those who had traveled miles and arrived at early dawn. Many were disappointed at not getting a sight of Jumbo, who, along with the large herd of elephants, was taken up the back streets to the grounds.

The public generally form their impression of the quality of the inside performance of a circus by the gorgeousness, variety and length of the street parade; the one witnessed by the thousands who lined both side of Dundas street put in



the shade anything before seen in Woodstock,—the numerous bands of music, gilded chariots, steam calliope, open dens of wild animals, droves of camels and dromedaries, the handsome zebras, herds of elephants, and the finest collection of horses, large and small, ever seen with a circus—all contributed to make the vast throngs of spectators enthusiastic and good-natured.

Lizzie Rolland was one of three female riders on Barnum and London in 1883. The “e” at the end of her surname was probably added to give it a more European feel. Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.

It would require too much space to give a detailed account of even a small portion of the immense concern, and with a passing glance at the numerous side-shows of curiosities, monstrosities, and other minor attractions we follow our guide, the courteous and obliging press agent, Mr. D. S. Thomas, receiving such attention and information from him regarding the inhabitants of the menageries, both human and animal, from all parts of the world, that made it one of the most instructive strolls possible through that portion of this well-appointed circus.

Among the human curiosities are a tribe of Australian cannibals, small limbed, flat-nosed, brutal-looking fellows, who are marked with many self-inflicted scars and are said to be the lowest specimens of humanity known; then came the Zulus, a number of Sioux Indians, a large party of Nubians from Central Africa, the white robes which enfolded them forming a striking contrast to their black shiny skins, and a noticeable feature being the rows of beautiful white teeth. The two Burmese priests and the wild men of Borneo also came in for attention.

The Woodstock reporter called the Australian cannibals “the lowest specimens of humanity known.” This one sheet poster dates from 1883. Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.

Then came the event of the day—the introduction to Jumbo, a huge mountain of deeply wrinkled flesh, who stood alone in his rope enclosed ring, his back bearing a half-score of delighted youngster who were experiencing for the first time in their lives a ride on a real live elephant. Beside Jumbo the largest of the herd looked small. The other animals were then visited and the sights of the large menagerie taken in detail, not forgetting the beautiful eyed, sleek looking giraffes.

We enter the large performing tent with its two rings and raised platform between, in time to witness the triumphal procession of horses, riders, actors and animals around the extensive hippodrome track, after which the real fun and performance began. Right here is the place to remark that it requires more than one pair of real sharp eyes to watch three separate performances going on at once, all the savages before mentioned taking part. The trick horses and large drove of elephants that are so perfectly trained elicited enthusiastic applause and admiration, while the chariot, hurdle and other races were cheered to the echo.

To say that everybody was delighted with the whole performance is mild praise, and never has a circus visited Woodstock that was conducted in a more orderly, gentlemanly and proper manner than Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson’s, and the almost total absence in town of any of the disorderly and rougher elements that usually appear among crowds on holidays showed that everybody was good-natured and happy.

Notes

A noticeable feature in the performance was the clowns, their jokes and quips being conspicuous by their absence, which deprives disappointed editors who didn’t receive a bushel of dead-head tickets of the satisfaction of working off their spite on the circus by abusing those funny men and crediting them with getting off puns that were old when Noah was a boy.

All along the route of the circus in Canada, the press is unanimous in its praise of the gentlemanly managers, and none are more highly complimented than Mr. Thomas, press agent.

Messrs. Bailey and Hutchinson travel with the circus, but Mr. Barnum remains at his home in Bridgeport, Conn.

The absence of peddlers who usually climb over people who attend circuses and spill pink lemonade on them was a pleasure.

The greatest precautions were taken to ensure the safety of those present. Every few minutes a man went the circuit of the tent to see that none of the stakes had moved or the ropes loosened.

S. S. Smith, known under the canvas as Sunday School Smith, is the orator of the show and “spoke his little speech” from a pedestal on the platform in a loud clear voice that was heard all over the vast enclosure. He received the “Sunday school committee” in charge of press agent Thomas with a suavity of manner that was irresistible.



The Great Huston

By Mike Straka

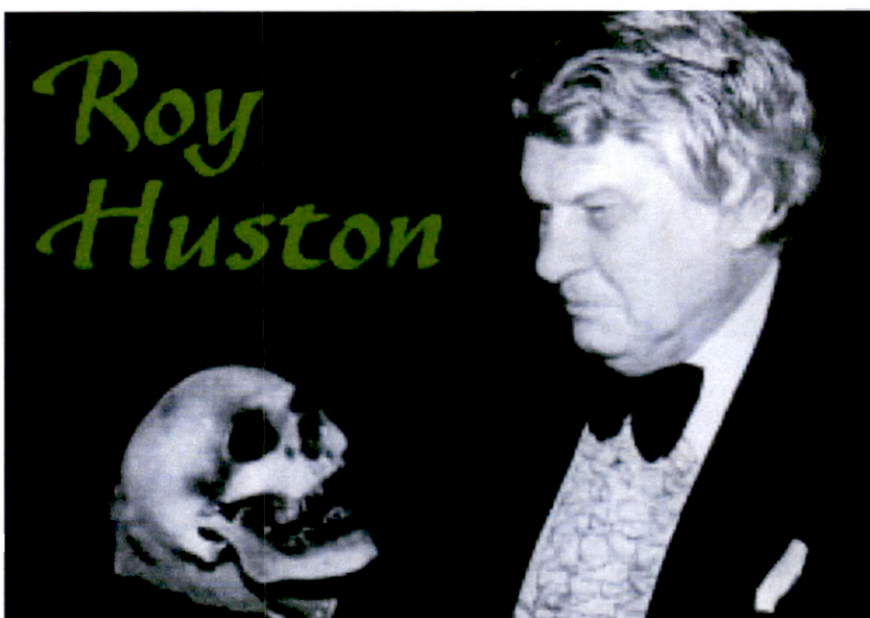
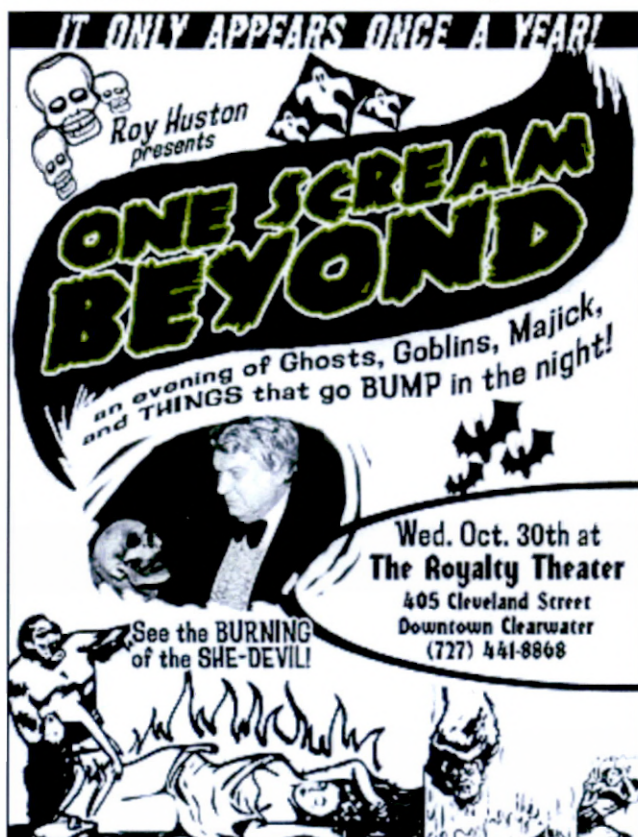
This tale of misadventure happened on the Paul Kaye Circus. Shane and Nicole Wright related this story and I spoke with Roy Huston to get his take on it. It was my last conversation with Roy before his passing this year.

It all started with a snowstorm. The show was moving to Omaha, Nebraska and was scheduled to open the next day. The weather stranded over half of the performers. Mr. Kaye had a clown, the Wainwrights, the Wilson sisters, Trudy Strong and the Great Huston. The show had a matinee to present with very few acts. Mr. Kaye gathered his cast and tried to figure out how he could put on a show for the Shriners.

A lobby poster for the Great Huston.

Roy was up for the challenge. He had started his magic career in the 1950's, and had worked in nightclubs, ghost shows and the circus. Normally, Roy would perform seven minutes in the circus

A newspaper ad for a Huston Ghost show, year unknown.



ring, but he suggested that if necessary he could stretch his act and perform additional illusions. He always carried more illusions than he performed, and could easily double the length of his act.

Roy pulled out tricks he had not done in years. As he concluded his act, he saved a spectacular illusion for his finish. He rolled out a large coffin-like box and hypnotized his assistant. After he placed his assistant in the box, he set the coffin on fire. He could hear the crowd reacting to this.

Now for the big finish, Roy dropped the sides of the box to reveal a human skeleton engulfed in fire.

The crowd was screaming. Normally, this illusion is followed by a reappearance of the girl. This would have been easy with the Wilson sisters on the show. Roy choose not to soften the effect; he ended the trick with the skeleton burning. As he left the circus ring, he knew this was something people would be talking about.

When Roy reached backstage he was met by an angry group of Shriners. At this point the story is subject to debate. Some claim Roy was fired, some say not. What is clear, the Shriners were not happy. Roy was mystified. He could not figure out what was wrong. What Roy didn't know was that the matinee was for the Shrine Burns Hospital. The Shriners had bused in hundreds of kids who were recovering from burns. During Roy's final illusion, the kids went wild, screaming, crying and reliving their recent horrors.

Roy was philosophical about the whole thing. As he quoted many times, "Through fires, floods and woes. Through folded and cancelled shows. Through missed paydays and run away wives. The mighty Huston still survives."

Another Roy Huston Story

Roy related this story over a few drinks. Well, perhaps more than a few. Before his years on the circus, he made a

living doing ghost shows. For those readers not familiar with a ghost show, I'll give a brief overview of this type of entertainment. Ghost shows were magic shows presented prior to a horror movie. They appeared in many forms and all of them featured a "blackout" as the finale.

The magician would be building up the anticipation when the spirits and demons would make an appearance. The last five minutes of the show would be done with all the lights turned out. The theater would be thrown into complete darkness.

Glow-in-the-dark spirits would show up. People in the audience would be touched by demons. Of course, teenage girls would grab their boyfriends and the other way around. This would all end with the beginning of the horror movie.

During one of his many engagements, Roy encountered a little problem. It was five minutes until the show, just enough time to go outside and collect his thoughts. He found the backstage exit and stepped out into the alley. He mentally went through a checklist for the show. The magic props were all set, the gorilla suit was stage left, the glow-in-the-dark spirits were pre-hung.

Everything was prepared to scare em' silly.

As Roy turned to enter the theater, he froze. The door was locked. He pounded on the stage door to no avail. Just like his newspaper ads said, nobody heard him scream. He had no time to run to the front of the theater. The show was starting. That's when he noticed a small 2

The Great Huston not long before his death.



A publicity photo for a young Huston.

x 3 foot door to the left of the stage door. This door was open a little, so Roy decided this was his way in.

He pulled the door open and crawled in. Roy was now in a coal chute, headed for the basement.

He ended up in the coal bin. He crawled out of the bin and headed back up to the stage.

Roy just made it to the stage as he was being introduced. Instead of applause, the crowd started to laugh. Soon the entire audience erupted in laughs and catcalls. He made it through the opening number but, realized he could not continue. He left the stage and told them to start the movie.

What Roy didn't realize was that his face and hands were covered in coal dust. His hands and face were black! He looked like a minstrel show performer in black face. Needless to say, the theater manager was not impressed.

Roy lead a colorful life. He will be missed by everyone who knew him.

